

Master Dogen's
SHINJI SHOBOGENZO

301 Koan Stories



Gudo Nishijima

Edited by
Michael Luetchford
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Shinji Shobogenzo

Gudo Nishijima was born in Yokohama, Japan in November 1919, and graduated from the Law Department of Tokyo University in September 1946.

In October 1940 he first met Master Kodo Sawaki, whose teaching he received until Master Kodo's death in December 1965. During this time, he combined the daily practice of Zazen and study of Shobogenzo with a career at the Japanese Ministry of Finance and at a securities financing company. In December 1973 he became a priest under the late Master Renpo Niwa, and in December 1977 he received the transmission of Dharma from the same Master (who subsequently became the abbot of Eihei-ji temple). Shortly thereafter he became a consultant to the Ida Ryogokudo company, and in 1987 established the Ida Ryogokudo Zazen Dojo in Ichikawa City near Tokyo. Now in his eighties, he continues to give instruction in Zazen, and lectures on Master Dogen's works, in Japanese and in English.

Gudo Nishijima's other publications in English include *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo* (in four volumes) and *To Meet the Real Dragon* (with Jeffrey Bailey), published by Windbell Publications.

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Introduction to the Shinji Shobogenzo

Shobogenzo means “The Right-Dharma-Eye Treasury.” *Shinji* means “original (or true) characters,” which refers here to the Chinese characters that compose the book. The Shinji Shobogenzo is variously known as the “*Shobogenzo Sanbyakusoku*” (Three Hundred Verse Shobogenzo) and the “*Mana Shobogenzo*” (“*mana*” being an alternative reading of “*shinji*”). It is a collection of three hundred and one Chinese *mondo*, (questions and answers, discussions), commonly called *koans*, stories describing the conversations and actions of ancient Buddhist masters.

Compiled in the 13th century by Master Dogen, the founder of the Soto Sect of Buddhism and one of the most brilliant philosophers in Japanese history, the three hundred koans are divided into three sections or “books,” two containing one hundred koans each, and the third containing one hundred and one koans. The Shinji Shobogenzo was originally titled simply “*Shobogenzo*,” the same as Master Dogen’s monumental work in Japanese. It seems that “*Shinji*” was added later, probably in order to distinguish the two works.

The origins of the Shinji Shobogenzo are obscure, and remain the subject of scholastic research. For centuries the authorship of the Shinji Shobogenzo was disputed, and in fact, until 1934, the only available version was an Edo period commentary from around the mid-1700s, *Nentei Sanbyakusoku Funogo*, by Master Shigetsu Ein. Then, in 1934, an important discovery was made at Kanazawa Bunko, an archive of medieval documents in Kanagawa. A copy of one of the three books of the Shinji Shobogenzo was found, dated 1288, thereby proving the existence of the book not long after Master Dogen’s death in 1253. Also, the stories themselves bear great resemblance to their quotations in Master Dogen’s Japanese Shobogenzo.

Today most Buddhist scholars agree that the book was written by Master Dogen. Its date of compilation is still disputed but there is a strong case for believing that it was at least begun by Master Dogen when he was studying at Kenninji Temple, near Kyoto, before he made his voyage to China, perhaps as reference material for his studies.

There are a number of differing views, both concerning the links between the Sung dynasty texts in which these stories are originally collected (including *Keitoku Dentoroku*, *Shumon Toyoshu*, *Engo Goroku*, *Wanshi Goroku*, etc.) and also regarding the nature of the relationship between Master Dogen’s two *Shobogenzo* texts. However, it seems clear that he used his collection of koans as source material for both his lectures and his writings. While in the Shinji

Shobogenzo Master Dogen recorded these koans without comments, in his masterwork, the Shobogenzo in Japanese, and in the record of his lectures, *Eihei Koroku*, Master Dogen makes constant reference to many of the stories, commenting on them, interpreting them, even deconstructing and reconstructing them to suit his own didactic purposes. For a detailed and learned comparative discussion of the two Shobogenzo texts, together with a useful index of the appearance of the koan stories in Master Dogen's works, the reader is referred to *Dogen and the Koan Tradition – A Tale of Two Shobogenzo Texts*, by Steven Heine, published by the State University of New York Press, 1994.

It is significant to note that Master Dogen referred to these *mondo* as *kosoku* (ancestral criteria) or *innen* (cause or result, and circumstances, a story) – he did not refer to them as *koans*. Master Dogen used the word *koan* to mean Dharma or the Universe that we are living in, as in Shobogenzo *Genjo-koan* (*The Realized Universe*), an entirely different usage from its meaning as used in the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism. In his writing and talks, he uses the stories that he collected to examine and explain Buddhist teachings and the Buddhist system of logic. However, it is important to emphasize that nowhere in his works does he recommend that these *koan* stories be used as part of Zazen practice.

Notes on the Translation

Nishijima Roshi published a complete Japanese translation of the Shinji Shobogenzo from the Chinese around 1985, and has continued to lecture and publish detailed commentaries on them since that time.

He started dictating an English translation and commentaries on the stories to Larry Zacchi, Michael Luetchford, and Mike Cross soon after this, but it was not until 1989 that the first one hundred stories were edited and a limited number of copies of *Shinji Shobogenzo, Book One* were printed. The project was then put on hold for nearly ten years, as we became involved in the translation and publication of the four main Shobogenzo volumes.

This present publication is based on those original dictations. A lot of additional work has been done in checking the content against Nishijima Roshi's detailed commentaries in Japanese, and clarifying the meanings of the stories with him. Japanese readings have been used throughout for the names of Chinese masters, temples, and places, and Sanskrit terms have been rendered simply without diacriticals.

Since the original stories are written in Chinese, context plays an important role in the translation. We have often referred to *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo* (Nishijima & Cross, in four volumes, Windbell Publications) in refining the

translation of these stories, since he comments on many of the stories in great detail. However, we have adopted a more interpretive style in this book, compared with the more literal translation approach used in the *Shobogenzo*.

Our aim has always been to make the meaning of the stories clear. Although many have said that these koan stories can be used in some illogical way to break through the barrier of the intellect, Buddhist philosophy is not incomprehensible. The Buddha's teachings are always logical, and they can be understood following a logical system.

The Buddha acknowledged that there is an ineffable aspect to this world that cannot be grasped by logical enquiry, and one of the aims of Buddhist practice and study is to notice that there is an area that logic cannot grasp. However, up to that point, Buddhism has a very clear philosophical system, and that system is implicit in the structure of these stories.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Yoko Luetchford and Reiko Pearson for the considerable work they have done in checking the stories against the Japanese, and in clarifying details of Nishijima Roshi's commentaries.

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Michael Luetchford
 Jeremy Pearson
 Bristol
 November 2002

Shobogenzo and the Four Views

When I was eighteen, I found a book called the Shobogenzo. It was written in the thirteenth century by the founder of the sect of Buddhism in Japan which is based on the practice of Zazen. His name is Master Dogen. I found the Shobogenzo almost impossible to read at that time, and I was amazed that there could be a book written in my own language which I was unable to understand at all. But although I could not understand it, I had the feeling that the book might contain important and valuable things.

This was the start of what was to become forty years of study. And when at last I could understand the meaning of the Shobogenzo, it also became clear to me why I had found it so difficult for so long. The book itself is composed of many contradictory statements, and this made it appear illogical. But after reading and re-reading many times, I found that the Shobogenzo is in fact constructed in a very special way; using a unique pattern of expression.

Master Dogen expresses his ideas in the Shobogenzo based on a pattern of four phases. First, he explains a problem from the idealistic point of view; that is, as an idea using abstract concepts. Then, immediately after this first phase, he explains the same problem, but this time from the objective, or material point of view. In other words, he gives concrete examples and facts. Then, in the next phase, he explains the problem yet a third time as a real problem; that is, on the basis of action.

Of course, he cannot fully explain the reality surrounding the problem with words in a book, but he does so by bringing together the subjective viewpoint which he presents first, and the second objective viewpoint. He synthesizes the two viewpoints into a realistic appraisal of the problem based upon the philosophy of action, which states that in action, there is a synthesis of the self and the external world. And in the final phase, he tries to suggest the subtle ineffable nature of reality itself by using symbolic, poetic, or figurative forms of speech.

The Shobogenzo is full of these four-phased explanations. The chapters themselves fall into four groups: theoretical, objective, realistic, and figurative or poetic. The contents of the chapters are also divided in the same way, and even the content of individual paragraphs follows the same pattern. In general, a theoretical or subjective explanation and a materialistic or objective explanation of the same problem will always be contradictory. Again, a realistic explanation will seemingly be in contradiction to both the subjective and objective points of view. And the real situation itself is different again from the realistic explanation given.

When we first read the Shobogenzo, we are astounded by what appear to be gross contradictions in logic. This is one of the reasons why the book is so difficult to understand. It appears full of opposing ideas.

However, after I had read and re-read Master Dogen's book, I got used to this unique way of thinking about things. He discusses all problems from three points of view, subjective and theoretical, objective and material, and action/realistic. He then insists on the difference between his three viewpoints and the actual situation itself. Using this method, he is able to explain the reality of a situation very clearly and logically. He believes that the most important thing is to see what the reality itself is; and at the same time, he realizes how impossible this is using the medium of the written word.

So this unique pattern or logical system is Master Dogen's way of suggesting what reality is. And I believe that Master Dogen's method is in fact a very realistic way of explaining reality. I found that Master Dogen's ideas were very realistic, and I found too that Buddhism is a religion of reality.

The stories in the Shinji Shobogenzo also follow the same unique logical system, and if they are studied from the four viewpoints, we find that they are very realistic stories that were used to teach the fundamental principles of Buddhism. They contain nothing mystical or incomprehensible; they are the Buddhist Masters' way of pointing to reality.

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BOOK ONE

ONE

Quoting:

One day Master Sekito Kisen visited Master Seigen Gyoshi of Jogo Temple on Mount Seigen in the Ki district. Master Seigen asked him:
Where have you come from?

Master Sekito said: *From Mount Sokei.*

Master Seigen (picking up his *hossu*) said: *Is there anything like this on Mount Sokei?*

Master Sekito said: *No, not on Mount Sokei, nor even in India.*

Master Seigen said: *You have never been to India, have you?*

Master Sekito said: *If I went to India, I may find a *hossu* like yours.*

Master Seigen said: *You have never been to India, so you should say something in accordance with your experience.*

Master Sekito said: *Could the Master express one or two concrete words, instead of leaving it all up to me, Kisen.*

Master Seigen said: *It is not that I refuse to say something for you, but if I did so you would not be able to hit the target for yourself in the future.*

Commentary

Master Seigen Gyoshi was a disciple of Master Daikan Eno, the sixth patriarch in China, and Sekito Kisen was to become his disciple. Master Sekito had come from Mount Sokei, where Master Daikan had lived when he was alive. Master Seigen Gyoshi was rather proud of his talks on Buddhism, and using his *hossu*, he asked Master Sekito whether the talks on Mount Sokei explained Buddhism as well as he did. The *hossu*, an ornate horsehair fly whisk carried by a Buddhist master, is a symbol of the Buddhist truth.

In his reply, Master Sekito used the *hossu* as a concrete symbol of Master Seigen's teachings. He said there were no other teachings exactly like Master Seigen's anywhere; neither at the place he had come from, nor even in India.

Master Seigen pointed out that Master Sekito could not know about India, since he had not been there, but Master Sekito replied that it may be possible to

find the same teachings as Master Seigen's in India, the home of Gautama Buddha.

However, Master Seigen thought that he should have been more realistic in what he said. He said that we should only speak from our own experience.

Master Sekito felt somewhat at a loss for how to reply in a way that would satisfy Master Seigen, and asked the Master to help him.

Finally, Master Seigen Gyoshi said it would be easy for him to say something, but to do so would deprive Master Sekito of the chance to express his own truth.

The structure of the story contains four different viewpoints. First is the idealistic or intellectual viewpoint, represented by Master Seigen's question about Buddhist talks, and symbolized by the *hossu*. In the second viewpoint, Master Sekito looks at things materialistically. The *hossu* – the actual physical *hossu* which Master Seigen held up – existed only in that one place, not in India or on Mount Sokei.

Master Seigen was not satisfied and wanted to hear something from a more realistic viewpoint. He knew that Master Sekito had not been to India, and asked him to speak from experience, not supposition. From the ultimate viewpoint, Master Seigen knew that Master Sekito must learn how to express his own truth. No-one could do that for him.

TWO

Master Obaku Ki-un on Mount Obaku in the Ko district asked Master Hyakujo Ekai: *When I want to share with others the teachings that you have given us, how should I teach them?*

Master Hyakujo Ekai just remained seated on his cushion without saying anything.

Obaku Ki-un said: *How can I teach the sons and grandsons of disciples in the future?*

Master Hyakujo said: *What you have said shows that you are a real person.*

Commentary

This koan is similar to the story of Sakra Devanam Indra who asked the Buddha, *"How can I protect those who wish to practice the Dharma?"* The Buddha replied by asking, *"Can you see the Dharma that you wish to protect. Where is it? The desire to protect the Dharma is like the desire to protect space itself. Buddhist practitioners protect the Dharma and themselves by living in the truth."*

Master Obaku's first question was an abstract one. He wanted to know the best way to convey the intellectual content of his Master's teachings. Master Hyakujo's answer was similar to the Buddha's, but more direct. Master Hyakujo answered by presenting his own Buddhist practice, by continuing to sit in Zazen.

Master Obaku understood the intent of his master's behavior. He then asked a more concrete question. How could he transmit the teachings to those in the future, with whom he would have no direct contact. In reply Master Hyakujo simply said that Obaku's understanding of his master's actions, along with his concern for future disciples, showed that he was a man who lived in reality.

Master Hyakujo was pleased that Obaku could shift from the level of abstract philosophy to a more practical and realistic level of concern for his fellow disciples and their descendants. He had no doubts about Master Obaku's ability to solve his problem.

THREE

Master Joshu Jushin of the Jo district asked Master Nansen: *What happens to a person who has recognized existence? Where does he go?*

Master Nansen said: *He goes to live in the house of a temple supporter in front of the temple gate and becomes a castrated water buffalo.*

Joshu Jushin said: *I thank the Master for the teachings I have received.*

Master Nansen said: *Last night at midnight the moon came through my window.*

Commentary

The koan begins on the idealistic level with Master Joshu's question about the behavior of a person who has recognized reality. Perhaps, like many people today, he had an idealized vision of such a person: *"What is the behavior of the great saints who live in clear unobstructed reality? What miracles do they perform? How do they express their sublime wisdom?"*

Master Nansen would have none of that. He took Joshu's abstract idea and applied it to a very practical and concrete situation. Master Nansen was getting old. Before too long the rigorous life in the temple might be too much for him. Where would he go? He would go to the house of some nearby temple supporters where he would live like a *"castrated water buffalo,"* which lives peacefully and quietly, causing trouble to no-one. Where does a person who can recognize reality go? What does he do? He simply does what the situation demands.

Joshu Jushin expressed his thanks for his master's teaching and the koan ends with the fourth phase: reality itself. Master Nansen expressed the simple wonder of reality: moonlight streaming through his window late at night. All situations contain this same simple beauty.

FOUR

Ryo, the *Zasu* (temple master) on Mount Sei in the Ko district, one day became a disciple of Master Baso.

Master Baso said: *Which sutra do you lecture on?*

Ryo said: *The Heart Sutra.*

Master Baso said: *How do you lecture on it?*

Ryo said: *I lecture on it with my mind.*

Master Baso said: *Mind is the leading actor, will is a supporting player, and the six senses are the followers, so how can you lecture on the Sutra?*

Ryo said: *If it is impossible for mind to lecture on the Sutra, then do you say that just empty space can lecture on it?*

Master Baso said: *Even space can lecture on it.*

Ryo started to leave, swinging his wide sleeves as he went. Master Baso called out to him.

Master Baso called: *Kansu!*

Ryo turned his head.

Master Baso said: *From birth to death it is just this!*

Master Ryo realized the truth and concealed himself on Mount Sei. Nobody knows what happened to him after that.

Commentary

The title "*Zasu*" suggests a master who only teaches theoretical Buddhism. The question "*How do you lecture on the sutra?*" also means "*How do you express your Buddhist life?*" Ryo's answer was completely inadequate because Buddhism which is expressed or understood only by the intellect is not really Buddhism at all. It is at best only the pale shadow or ghost of Buddhism.

Ryo could not accept this criticism. He tried to mock Master Baso by saying, "*Do you think that just empty space can lecture on the sutra?*" Instead of responding defensively to Ryo's attack, Master Baso said in effect, "*Yes, that's right. Now you're getting closer.*" Buddhism is the study of reality. Its aim and fundamental basis is reality itself.

Ryo took this answer as a sign of his master's foolishness. He rose and began to leave the room, swinging his arms widely to show his pride in having defeated his Master. Baso caught him up short with "*From birth to death it is just this.*" These words knocked Ryo out of the intellectual game he had been playing and presented him with reality here and now. It is just this, the Master said; two human beings born into the world and both bound to die, living in reality moment by moment.

After realizing the truth, Ryo disappeared forever into the mountains. What a contrast from the immense self-pride that his former behavior displayed!

FIVE

A layman named Ho-on of the Jo district asked Master Sekito: *What kind of person is independent of all things and phenomena?*

Master Sekito covered the layman's mouth with his hand.

At this, the layman realized the truth clearly and suddenly.

At another time, the layman asked the same question of Master Baso Do-itsu.

Ho-on said: *What kind of person is independent of all things and phenomena?*

Master Baso Do-itsu said: *I will answer you after you have completely swallowed up all the water of the Seiko river in one gulp.*

The layman realized the truth after hearing these words.

Commentary

"A person who is independent of all things and phenomena" means a person who has attained the Buddhist truth. Ho-on was asking the Master to describe the state of someone who has transcended the world of relative things and phenomena. He asked this question and started to sit back and wait for the Master's answer.

Just then Master Sekito placed his hand over Ho-on's mouth. This represents a shift from the idealistic or mental sphere of the question to the material world of an actual hand and mouth. Ho-on asked his question, then suddenly found it impossible to speak, just as it was impossible for the Master to say anything which could describe the state of enlightenment. The sudden shift from the world of the intellect to the material world allowed Ho-on to see both aspects of reality clearly. He was able to discover for himself the nature of a person who is independent of all things and phenomena.

The second part of the koan is similar. The layman asked his question and the Master threw it back at him in the form of an equally impossible demand. The demand points up the nature of the first phase: we can easily think of swallowing the water of the Seiko River in one gulp, but actually doing it is something else entirely.

We can easily create an image of an enlightened person, or spin out elaborate theories and opinions, but actually living in reality, actually sitting on your cushion and practicing is another matter completely.

SIX

One day a monk asked Master Roya Ekaku of the Joshu District: *It is said that the Universe is pure and shows its original form. How is it possible for it to manifest mountains, rivers, and the earth?*

Roya Ekaku said: *The whole Universe is pure and shows its original form. How is it possible for it to manifest mountains, rivers, and the earth!*

Commentary

Master Roya answered the monk's question by repeating the question again. The Master's question is a rhetorical one. He is saying in effect that it is not possible for the Universe to manifest mountains, rivers, and the earth because the Universe is pure and shows its original form. Mountains, rivers, and the earth are concepts and ideas which are used to describe the ineffable reality of the Universe. That ineffable reality is always pure and shows its original form.

From another standpoint we can also say that the original form and purity of the Universe is nothing other than mountains, rivers, and the earth. The four philosophies can help clarify this koan.

In the first phase we have the idealistic Buddhist assertion that the whole Universe is pure and shows its original form.

The monk's question is in the second phase. He cannot see the purity of the Universe or its original form. All he can see is mountains, rivers, and earth. This is the viewpoint of materialism.

Master Roya's answer is in the third phase in that it is a synthesis of the two previous viewpoints. Mountains, rivers, and the earth do not exist except as labels that attempt to describe something that is ultimately beyond description: the original form of the pure Universe. This original form is not some vague idea or spirit floating out in space somewhere. It is nothing other than reality itself. It is mountains, rivers, and the earth.

The fourth phase is reality itself. It may be seen as pure and the original form of the Universe, or it may be seen as mountains, rivers, and the earth; but ultimately it is beyond any such description. It must be experienced directly. The practice of experiencing reality directly is called Zazen.

SEVEN

Master Beiko of Keicho City told a monk to go to Master Kyozan Ejaku and ask this question: *Does a man who lives in the moment of the present need enlightenment or not?*

Master Kyozan Ejaku said: *It is not true if I say that there is no enlightenment, but I cannot avoid falling into a dual consciousness.*

Coming back to Master Beiko, the monk told him what Master Kyozan had said.

Master Beiko strongly affirmed Master Kyozan's words.

Commentary

"Falling into a dual consciousness" means to enter the state where our consciousness is divided. In this state, there is an "I" who is watching, referred to in some koans as a "second person." This is the subject-object mode of being in the world, and it is, by its very nature, partial; it does not encompass all of reality. When we act, our consciousness becomes whole, and we lose awareness of the separation between subject and object.

Master Kyozan said that although he could not deny that a state of enlightenment existed for him, it was also true that at times he fell into a divided way of viewing the world. This was a very realistic and honest answer. The idealistic view is that enlightenment is sudden and complete. Once we have won the great spiritual prize of enlightenment, we become spiritual supermen or gods, no longer troubled by the petty concerns of life. Master Kyozan maintained that, although we sometimes experience a state of enlightenment, sometimes our consciousness is divided.

EIGHT

Master Baso Do-itsu of Kozei in the Ko district served as Master Nangaku Ejo's *Jisha* (personal secretary) and intimately received Gautama Buddha's mind-seal. He lived in Denpo Temple constantly sitting in Zazen, and was the most outstanding of Master Nangaku's disciples. Master Nangaku knew that Master Baso had exceptional ability in studying Buddhism.

Master Nangaku went to Master Baso and asked: *Now, great monk, what is your intention in practicing Zazen?*

Baso Do-itsu said: *I intend to become a buddha.*

Nangaku Ejo picked up a piece of tile and began to polish it on a stone in front of Master Baso's hut.

Baso Do-itsu said: *Master, what are you doing?*

Nangaku Ejo said: *I am polishing this tile to make it into a mirror.*

Baso Do-itsu said: *How can polishing a tile make it into a mirror?*

Nangaku Ejo said: *How can sitting in Zazen make you into a buddha?*

Baso Do-itsu asked: *What is the right thing to do?*

Nangaku Ejo said: *When a man is riding a carriage, if the carriage does not go forward, what should we do? Strike the carriage, or strike the ox which draws the carriage?*

Baso Do-itsu had no reply.

Nangaku Ejo taught further: *Learning Zazen is to learn that you are a buddha in Zazen. When you learn Zazen, it is different from everyday behavior like sitting or lying down. However, when you are learning that you are a buddha in Zazen, that buddha is beyond any fixed form.*

Nangaku Ejo said: *We should not prefer good or bad in the Universe at the moment of the present. When you practice being buddha in Zazen, you inevitably get rid of the concept of buddha. To become attached to the form of sitting, is not to have understood the principle of Zazen perfectly.*

Hearing the Master's teaching, Baso felt as if he had drunk a sweet nectar.

Commentary

Usually this koan is interpreted to mean that one cannot become a buddha only by practicing Zazen. But Master Dogen's interpretation was somewhat different. It was the idea of intentionally *becoming* that he attacked. When a person sits in Zazen he is a buddha already. He cannot *become* a buddha again. The polishing is not the making of a mirror, it is just the act of polishing – it is the action of a buddha.

What does it mean to say that one is a buddha when sitting in Zazen? When we sit in Zazen we face reality directly. We face thoughts, emotions, and discomfort (both physical and mental). We also see that reality is something more than just thoughts or just the body.

This is difficult to notice, especially for beginners. When they sit, what they usually feel is pain and boredom. It is very far from their idealistic image of enlightenment or buddhahood. However, the pain and boredom are their reality.

In our usual life we go to great lengths to run away from or cover up this aspect of reality. In Zazen we confront it directly. It cannot be escaped; it must be lived through and experienced. Reality is not just pain and boredom, there are many other and much deeper aspects of reality. These are met and faced in Zazen, as well. But they are met as they arise naturally of themselves.

Our intellectual images of enlightenment cannot hurry things along. The intellect itself is nothing more than a thin surface layer on the much deeper ocean of mind/body reality.

Master Baso then asked what he should do, and Master Nangaku used the simile of a carriage drawn by an ox. If the ox is stubborn we can make it go forward by striking it, but if the carriage wheel is stuck we can beat the ox as much as we like and still not make any progress. We should be alert to the reality of the situation and not project our preconceived ideas upon it.

The ox represents the mind or mental factors. The carriage represents the body or material factors. The idealist thinks only of striking the ox. He ignores the carriage, until perhaps one day one of the wheels falls off and dumps him in the mud.

The materialist thinks only of the carriage. Perhaps he wants it to look trim and fast, or he wants to decorate it with gold and precious jewels; meanwhile he lets the ox starve to death and his fine carriage cannot be budged.

Zazen is a practice of the body/mind – the total being. The Buddhist tends to both the ox and the carriage.

Master Nangaku then went on to explain the difference between Zazen and everyday conduct. He explained what it means to learn Zazen; to learn that we

are a buddha in Zazen. He insisted that Zazen is different from our usual conduct, such as sitting or lying down. How is it different? In our usual life we are usually bound up with thoughts. We have difficulty seeing reality because of those thoughts. In Zazen we cut through the obscuring cloud of thoughts.

On the other hand it is different from our usual relaxed states, in that Zazen preserves a certain amount of physical tension and mental alertness. Master Nangaku wanted to make this distinction between Zazen and our usual life because there were and still are some Buddhists who insist that the conduct of our usual life is not different from Zazen. And it is true that they are the same in that they both exist in reality itself, but in our usual life it is very difficult, and for most people impossible, to see reality clearly.

In Zazen we sit in reality and experience it directly in a way that seldom occurs in our usual lives. This experience gradually changes our daily lives. When we sit in Zazen we are a buddha. A buddha in Zazen does not have a fixed form. A buddha in Zazen might be tall and blonde, short and chubby, an athlete, an old woman, or a teenager. In addition a buddha in Zazen has many states: peaceful, serene, distracted, bored, joyous, etc.

There is no one state we can point to and say "This is what you are looking for; when you attain this state then you have attained buddhahood." Such preconceived ideas are only images in our brain. There is no finite form for a buddha. Each person sitting in Zazen has his or her own form. Thus we can say that Zazen is decorated with the infinite forms of buddha.

Master Nangaku then told Baso not to prefer good or bad in the moment of acting. In the instantaneous flash of reality there is neither good nor bad. There are neither buddhas nor non-buddhas. In the actual practice of Zazen there is no "buddha" to be found; our concepts of buddha have been left behind and we are free to sit in reality itself. We are free to be buddhas.

If we attach to the physical form of sitting, for instance by concentrating on breathing, or by encouraging a constant physical awareness, we have not understood that Zazen is sitting with oneness of body-and-mind, the state where there is no emphasis on either the mental or the physical.

NINE

Once Master Obaku departed from Mount Obaku leaving his disciples and entered Dai-an Temple. He mixed with other laborers and swept and cleaned the Buddha Hall and the Lecture Hall.

One day Prime Minister Haikyū entered the temple and burned incense. A *Shuji* (temple officer) received the minister.

The minister happened to see a picture on a wall and asked: *What kind of figure is this?*

The monk said: *This is a picture of a reverend monk.*

The Prime Minister said: *I can see the picture, but where is the reverend monk?*

None of the monks there could answer the question.

The Prime Minister said: *Are there any men of Zazen in this temple?*

The monk said: *There is one monk who came to work at the temple recently. He seems like a man of Zazen.*

The Prime Minister said: *Could you bring him here so that I may ask him the question?*

The monks immediately went to look for Master Obaku. When he saw Master Obaku, the Prime Minister seemed glad and said: *Just now I had a question, but none of the monks can answer it. I would like to ask you to answer in place of the others, and to give me one word which can change my life.*

Master Obaku said: *Prime Minister, please ask me the same question.*

The Prime Minister repeated his previous question.

The Master called out loudly: *Prime Minister!*

The Prime Minister responded.

The Master said: *Where are you?*

The Prime Minister was enlightened, just as if he had received a pearl from the knot in Gautama Buddha's hair.

He said: *My Master is truly a reverend monk.*

Then he again invited Master Obaku to open the temple.

Commentary

The Prime Minister's question "*I can see the picture, but where is the reverend monk?*" divides the picture from what it represents – the abstract representation in the picture from the physical body of the monk who is depicted. The question points to the difference between the idealistic and materialistic viewpoints. In "*answering*" the question, the Master called out to the Prime Minister in a loud voice. This is a concrete fact, an actual physical sound, and brings the focus into the second or concrete viewpoint.

When the Prime Minister responded, Master Obaku then asked him "*Where are you?*" which focuses on the actual place, the actual situation in which they were involved. It opened the Prime Minister's eyes to the reality of the situation as it actually existed in that very place. The distinction between the picture, or idea, and what it represented had been transcended. There were not two things: the image of something, and what the image referred to; there was only the one reality.

The Prime Minister had found the reverend monk. Would you say Master Obaku was the reverend monk? What about the Prime Minister? Could we not also say he was the reverend monk of the story? Perhaps the reverend monk he found was his own true self.

And what about you in your own life? You no doubt have seen many pictures or have held many ideas about what a reverend person should be like. But can you find this person in reality, in your own life? That is the true task of a Buddhist.

TEN

One day a monk asked Master Seigen Gyoshi: *What was Master Bodhidharma's intention in coming to China from India?*

Seigen Gyoshi said: *He just acted as he was.*

The monk said: *Would you tell me again what you just said right now in words that I can understand?*

Seigen Gyoshi said: *Come here!*

The monk approached his master.

Seigen Gyoshi said: *Remember this clearly!*

Commentary

The monk's first question was a common way for Buddhist students to ask the reason that Bodhidharma came to China from India bringing the teachings of Buddhism. The question is really asking about the fundamental aim of the Buddhist life. Master Seigen Gyoshi said that Bodhidharma's behavior was just as it was. He did what he did. His conduct was a simple historical fact, which followed the circumstances of the time and Bodhidharma's own character.

Of course, we can find meaning and importance in Bodhidharma's actions, but in answer to the monk's question the Master chose to emphasize the simple objective fact of Bodhidharma's behavior.

The monk did not understand this answer and wanted a more detailed explanation, so the Master told the monk to get up and approach him. While the monk was doing this the Master told him, "*Remember this clearly.*"

The Master wanted the monk to forget about his abstractions for a while and to just notice the reality of his simple action. Just walking, just acting naturally in response to the real demands of the situation. This is the reason Bodhidharma went to China from India. This is the heart of the teaching that he transmitted.

ELEVEN

Quoting:

Master Joshu Jushin preached to a large assembly: *If we are even slightly consciousness of right and wrong, we lose the Buddha-mind completely. Does anyone have anything to say about this?*

A monk walked forward and hit the Master's *Jisha* (personal assistant), saying: *Why don't you answer the Master?*

The Master went back to his personal room at once. After that the *Jisha* asked the Master to explain: *Did the monk who struck me just now understand what you meant?*

Joshu Jushin said: *The person who was sitting could see the person who was standing. And the person who was standing could see the person who was sitting.*

Commentary

Master Joshu said that even a slight consciousness of right and wrong disturbs our stability. It is our mind that discriminates between right and wrong. This power to divide, discriminate, and analyze is an essential part of our daily life, but it cannot apprehend reality directly. The Buddha-mind is a state in which we apprehend reality directly, and therefore it necessarily transcends all discrimination. This idea leads many people to wrong conclusions. They get a very strange image of what a person who lives in such a state is like.

To illustrate this we can point out the difference between a baby and a buddha. We can say that both of them live in a state free from abstract notions of right and wrong. However, the baby does so because it has not yet fully developed a rational discriminating mind, whereas a buddha has realized that the essence is not just to *know* what is right and what is wrong, but simply to *do* right, and *not do* wrong.

The person who sees reality, who lives in the same state as the Buddha *does* right from the deepest core of their being; not by following a list of virtues written in a book, but by following the rule of the Universe itself.

Master Joshu Jushin asked if anyone has anything to say about the consciousness that goes beyond right and wrong. Since language is itself based on just that discrimination, it would seem that the Master had given his students an impossible task.

How to avoid the contradiction? The monk in the story chose to respond through his own real action. The young monk who had been chosen as his Master's personal assistance had not yet grounded his Buddhism in reality. He was unable to meet his Master's challenge, so the other monk supplemented the Master's abstract question with a few concrete blows from the second (material) viewpoint.

The behavior of this monk was itself the answer to Master Joshu's question. It was a concrete demonstration of the mind that acts correctly without discrimination according to the demands of the real situation.

In the third phase of the koan the *Jisha* wanted to find out what the Master's real feeling was about the actions of the monk who had struck him. His question was a sincere one; it was a question from his real life and not just part of a philosophical game.

In Master Joshu's answer, the words "*the person who was sitting*" refer to himself and "*the person who was standing*" refer to the other monk. Thus the Master affirmed the monk's understanding. They could see each other clearly. Their understanding of Buddhism was the same.

TWELVE

Master Tozan Ryokai of the In district preached to an assembly: *When we have understood what Ascending Buddhas are through real experience, then we can talk with each other.*

Then a monk asked: *What sort of "talking" would that be?*

Tozan Ryokai said: *For example, when a monk is talking, he cannot listen.*

The monk said: *Can you listen under those circumstances, Master?*

Tozan Ryokai said: *When I am not talking, then I can listen.*

Commentary

After people realize the truth, they continue with their usual Buddhist practice and carry on with their daily lives. This is what is meant by the phrase "*Ascending Buddhas.*"

Master Tozan wanted to explain or demonstrate Ascending Buddhas to his disciples. The monk was interested in the nature of the talks that would take place after they had experienced the state of Ascending Buddhas for themselves.

The monk thought that such discussion among buddhas must be very sublime and mystical. But the Master freed him from this misconception. They are just ordinary talks he said. "*When a monk is talking he cannot listen.*" What could be more ordinary and practical.

However, the monk thought that surely the master with his deep wisdom is not limited by such ordinary circumstances. Again Master Tozan said only: "*When I am not talking, then I can listen.*" There is nothing strange or mysterious about that. The same is true of the life of an Ascending Buddha. It is simple, ordinary, and direct, but people enjoy setting up images or idols that they can venerate, rather than getting on with their own practice, which may at times seem too boring and ordinary.

This story is a bucket of fresh cold water for those intoxicated with a romanticized view of Zen.

THIRTEEN

One day a monk asked Master Tosu Daido of the Jo district: *How is it when the moon is not yet round?*

Master Tosu said: *The moon swallows two or three moons.*

The monk said: *How about after the moon becomes round?*

Master Tosu said: *The moon vomits seven or eight moons.*

Commentary

This koan is concerned with the relationship between concepts and concrete things. Before we notice the difference between concepts and reality, we are apt to believe that concepts are themselves real. After we notice this difference, we can accept many conceptual representations of a reality that is beyond them all.

"How is it when the moon is not yet round?" The full moon was a frequent symbol of the enlightened state or ultimate reality itself. Master Tosu Daido (Tosu Jisai in the text) said that the moon or the concept "*moon*" swallows two or three actual moons; that is, the concept is not the same as the actual moon. The complexity and ever-changing nature of the actual moon is simplified and obscured by the concept "*moon*."

And what about after the moon becomes round – after reality has been experienced directly? Then the actual moon throws out many different concepts which attempt to describe some aspect of the actual moon. The actual moon in all its varied character, changing moment by moment, transcends the seven or eight conceptual "*moons*."

FOURTEEN

One day Master Kyozan Ejaku asked Master Isan Reiyu on Mount Isan in the Tan district: *When hundreds, thousands, and tens of thousands of circumstances are coming at me at once, what can I do?*

Isan Reiyu: *Blue is a different color from yellow. Something long is different from something short. All beings have their own position in the Universe. They do not have any interest in us.*

Master Kyozan prostrated himself before the Master.

Commentary

Kyozan Ejaku asked what attitude he should take when innumerable problems or circumstances come at him all at once. This question indicates an attitude that is too subjective, so Master Isan answered it in an objective way.

Blue is different from yellow; long is different from short. These are objective facts of the world. They have no interest in helping or harming us. Furthermore, all things and phenomena have their own position or place in the Universe.

We do not need to worry about the circumstances of the world. We should deal with them realistically as they occur. If we deal with the problem in front of us now, we can then go on to deal with the next problem. In this way, we are able to solve our problems one by one. There is no other way.

FIFTEEN

One day a monk asked Master Gensa Shibi of the Fuku district: *I have heard that you said the whole Universe in all directions is just one brilliant pearl. How should students of Buddhism understand your words?*

Gensa Shibi said: *The whole Universe in all directions is just a brilliant pearl. How could it be useful to understand these words with the intellect?*

The next day Gensa Shibi asked the monk in turn: *The whole Universe in all directions is just one brilliant pearl. How do you understand this?*

The monk said: *The whole Universe in all directions is just one brilliant pearl. How could it be useful to understand these words with the intellect?*

Gensa Shibi said: *I see that you have been struggling like a demon in a cave on a black mountain.*

Commentary

The monk's first question suggests that he was trying to understand Master Gensa Shibi's words intellectually. However, the words were not a product of the intellect; they came from Master Gensa's long experience in Buddhist practice. They were an expression of the reality which transcends the intellect. Therefore Master Gensa said that it was not useful to try to understand these words intellectually.

The next day Master Gensa asked the monk the same question. This was a test or prompt to get the monk to express his own true nature. The monk responded by repeating Master Gensa's words. This imitative answer was rejected completely. The Master said the monk was like a demon struggling in the cave on a black mountain. He was trapped in the dark world of the intellect and was very far from seeing the brilliant pearl.

The monk recognized that the truth is not just a matter of the intellect. However, this recognition was itself only a matter of the intellect. He had not attained an intuitive understanding of it. It had not penetrated his bones and marrow. He was making his efforts but was still thrashing around in the dark.

SIXTEEN

One day a monk asked Master Chosa Keishin of Konan: *How can we make mountains, rivers, and the earth one with us?*

Chosa Keishin said: *How can we make ourselves one with mountains, rivers, and the earth?*

Commentary

The monk's question comes from the subjective viewpoint, because it takes the subjective world (us) as primary. He asks how the objective world (mountains, etc.) can be brought under the control of the subjective.

Master Chosa takes the opposite viewpoint. He takes the objective world as primary and asks how the subjective world (ourselves) can be made to fit the objective.

Both of these questions may be taken rhetorically: How could such a thing as making mountains, rivers, and the earth one with ourselves be possible? And also: How could such a thing as making ourselves one with mountains, rivers, and the earth be possible? Mountains, rivers, and the earth are just mountains, rivers, and the earth. We are just ourselves. So we may permit the objective world and ourselves to be as they are. It is not necessary to identify mountains, rivers, and the earth with ourselves.

From a third point of view, when we act, mountains, rivers, and the earth are completely one with us. In action we transcend the division between the subjective and objective worlds. This was often described in Buddhism as a state of oneness between ourselves and the world.

But since in the state of action we are already one with the mountains and rivers, why would it be necessary for us to *make* ourselves one with them?

SEVENTEEN

Master Kyogen Chikan of the To district was very clever and had a very vigorous nature. He was in the order of Master Isan Reiyu. He had a vast knowledge about many things.

One day Master Isan Reiyu said: *The things you say in your everyday life are all taken from sentences and commentaries in books. You are very good at quoting facts, but now I would like to ask you to tell me something from the time when you were too young even to recognize the difference between east and west.*

Then Kyogen Chikan said something in an effort to explain the principle, but his words were totally inadequate. He then searched the writings in his collection of books looking for an answer, but he could find nothing. He cried out and wept. Then he threw all his books into the fire and destroyed them.

He said: *I cannot hope to understand Zen in my lifetime. I would like to go into the mountains and practice alone.*

He went to Mount Buto where he built a hut on an old site where Master Nan-yo Echu had once lived. One day while he was sweeping the path a pebble struck the stem of a bamboo and made a loud sound. Kyogen Chikan was enlightened at once. He wrote this poem:

*The tile struck the bamboo and my consciousness
dropped away.*

*No longer concerned with improving body and mind,
I became like the ancient patriarchs.
Never again will my mind become dark.
Leaving no trace of my passing, I have now gone
beyond sound and form.*

*Throughout the country,
Those who have attained Buddhism
Will praise me as one who travels the Supreme Path.*

Hearing this poem, Master Isan Reiyu said: *This child has become mature.*

Commentary

Kyogen Chikan was respected for his knowledge and cleverness. Master Isan Reiyu quickly demonstrated the shallowness of Kyogen's understanding. Called upon to act from a deeper level than just the intellect, Kyogen found himself totally at a loss. In despair he gave up all hope of attaining Buddhist understanding. Seeing that the intellect alone was not sufficient, he failed to recognize that there were other approaches to the Buddhist truth.

Kyogen decided to live alone in a small hut. There he practiced Buddhism with no thought of an aim or goal. In this way he found the understanding that had eluded him before. The poem he wrote clearly shows that he had transcended the discriminating mind of the intellect and had come to live naturally in the same state as the ancient patriarchs.

EIGHTEEN

Master Nansen Fugan of Mount Nansen in the Chi district one day went to visit a rich man who lived on his own private estate. He discovered that the owner of the land had made preparations to receive him beforehand.

Seeing this, the Master said: *Usually when I travel about, no-one else knows where I am going. How is it that you knew of my coming and were prepared for it like this?*

The owner said: *A god of this land reported it to me last night.*

The Master said: *My practice is so weak that I am being spied on by a demon!*

Then his *Jisha* (personal attendant) asked: *You are a great reverend monk. Why were you spied on by that demon?*

The Master said: *Place a cup of rice in front of the demon's shrine.*

Commentary

The interesting point of this story is the idea that someone's state of mind can transcend gods and demons after practicing Buddhism for some time. In ancient Buddhism, it is said that those who have grasped the truth can teach not only human beings but also god in the heavens.

This idea suggests that the existence of gods and demons are mental creations, but if you pursue reality through Zazen, you can transcend such creations. This story of Master Nansen suggests that the state of mind of a real Buddhist practitioner should transcend the world of fantasy.

Master Nansen's ironic answer in the end was to simply offer rice to the demon, which is the traditional custom of the times.

NINETEEN

Master Joshu asked Master Nansen: *What is the truth?*

Master Nansen said: *Balanced and constant mind is the truth.*

Master Joshu said: *Can we reach it intentionally?*

Master Nansen said: *If we have such an intention, the truth will refuse us.*

Master Joshu said: *If we do not have any intention to reach the truth, how can we recognize the truth itself?*

Master Nansen said: *The truth does not belong to whether we recognize it or not. To recognize is a kind of illusion. Not to recognize is neither good nor bad. If we truly realize the truth of no-intention, the situation would be like space, which is clear, serene, and wide. So how can we dare to discuss whether it is right or wrong?*

On hearing the words of his Master, Master Joshu suddenly realized something profound.

Commentary

What is the truth? Here Master Nansen tells us directly: the balanced and constant mind is the truth. The catch is that the truth is not the words "*balanced and constant mind*"; the truth is to live "*balanced and constant mind*." Joshu then asks a question which troubles many students of Zen. Can we reach the truth through intentional effort, or not; and if not how can we recognize the truth when we have found it?

Master Nansen said that if we pursue the truth intentionally the truth will flee from us. This is because the intention to reach the truth is a product of the intellect. The truth encompasses our whole being, not just the intellect. So the intellect alone can never carry us to the truth. In fact most people begin their study of Buddhism with just such an intention. They want to attain this wonderful enlightenment that they've heard so much about.

However, actual practice is just simple practice; it is not tainted by any outside elements, no matter how beautiful or noble. The idea of attaining the truth is just that: an idea floating around in our brains. Usually, in the actual practice of Buddhism, it is quickly replaced by the sensation that our legs are on fire.

This is surely more important than the idea of enlightenment, because with the experience of the pain we learn that the world is not just thinking, not just

ideas. As we practice, we *"learn"* other things, not just with the mind or intellect but with our whole body/mind. We learn the balanced and constant body/mind. By this time the intention to attain enlightenment seems rather adolescent. We practice in reality itself, we experience reality itself.

The truth is clear and broad, it has no direct relationship to the fairy tale of attaining the truth through our intentional effort. It is time to cast off such ideas and begin the actual practice of Buddhism. The actual practice of Buddhism means Zazen.

TWENTY

One day Officer Jiku asked Master Chosa Keishin: *An earthworm is cut into two pieces and the two pieces are both moving. Which piece, I wonder, contains the worm's Buddha-nature?*

Master Chosa Keishin said: *Don't have illusions.*

Officer Jiku said: *But we cannot deny that the two pieces are moving.*

Master Chosa Keishin said: *This is because the physical elements of wind and fire have not yet expired.*

Officer Jiku didn't have any reply.

Then the Master called out to the Officer in a loud voice.

The officer answered: *Yes?*

Master Chosa Keishin said: *That natural attitude is your original life, isn't it?*

Officer Jiku said: *Yes. There would be no second master of myself even if we ended these questions and answers here and now.*

Master Chosa Keishin said: *I cannot call you Emperor today.*

Officer Jiku said: *If that is your opinion, I will give up all questions and answers with you. Do you think that I am not the master of myself?*

Master Chosa Keishin said: *Whether or not you reply to me is not important, but to worry about replying or not is the fundamental cause of life and death from the eternal past.*

Then he composed a poem:

*The reason Buddhist practitioners do not recognize
the truth,
Is that they only recognize the intellectual mind.
But that has been the cause of life and death
from the eternal past.
The stupid, however, think that it is their original nature.*

Commentary

Officer Jiku asked in which piece of an earthworm the Buddha-nature exists after the worm has been cut in two. This question may not be quite as bad as *"how many angels can stand on the head of a pin?"* but it has the same sterile intellectual spirit.

The Master refused to play the game. He told Jiku not to waste his time with illusions. At Jiku's insistence that we cannot deny the two parts are moving, Master Chosa answered again from the materialistic perspective: we should understand that the physical elements haven't expired yet.

At this point Jiku seemed to be rather at a loss. The Master called out Jiku's name loudly and he naturally responded *"Yes?"* This natural attitude and response was what the Master wanted Jiku to think about, not which end of a worm contains Buddha-nature.

Jiku said that he understood that our natural behavior is our original life, but his understanding was still only intellectual, as the rest of the koan demonstrates. Jiku's comment *"there would not be a second master of myself"* refers to a state of divided consciousness, or we might say self-consciousness.

The Master confirmed that the natural state was one of *"no second master,"* but Jiku misunderstood. He became angry at what he took to be criticism from the Master. Master Chosa then said that this worry or concern was precisely the fundamental cause of life and death, or we might say the suffering caused by life and death. This suffering is a product of the consciousness that discriminates between life and death. The consciousness which clings to pleasure and tries to flee from pain.

Master Chosa identifies this consciousness as the intellectual mind. We can identify it a little more precisely as the empirical ego, the sense of self, or *"I"* which seeks at all times its preservation and aggrandizement. Officer Jiku's anger came from what his ego perceived as an attack on its status or self-image. Master Chosa immediately identified this as the fundamental cause of life and death.

TWENTY-ONE

Quoting:

One day in the past, Master Banzan Hoshaku of the Yu district went to a shop in a town and noticed a customer who was buying pork.

The customer said to the butcher: *Please cut me one piece which is fresh.*

The butcher threw down his knife, and holding his hands in *shashu*, he said: *Sir, where is there any unfresh pork here?*

The Master realized the truth on hearing these words.

Commentary

In China butchers were looked down on because they lived by violating the Buddhist precept against killing. *Shashu* is a gesture in which both hands are placed in front of the chest, the right gripping the fist made by the left; it indicates an attitude of respect and reverence. It is a common part of a monk's life in the temple.

In the butcher's complete and sincere attitude toward his work, Master Banzan felt the sincerity of all things and phenomena. The butcher had made his work into his Buddhist practice. He stood in his dharma position (place in the Universe) as naturally as a rock or a river. This is the Buddhist attitude toward work and toward daily life in general. Buddhism does not end when we step out of the Zendo.

Buddhist masters sometimes talk of the miracle of chopping wood and carrying water. This is the miracle of daily life. It is the discovery of Buddhism, of life itself, in each and every moment.

TWENTY-TWO

Master Fuke of the Chin district usually went into a town ringing a bell and saying:

*If a clear mind comes, I let it be clear.
 If a deluded mind comes, I let it be deluded.
 If the wind comes from all directions,
 four or eight directions,
 I let it be as a whirlwind.
 And if space comes
 I will strike it again and again.*

One day Master Rinzai directed a monk to grab Master Fuke and without letting him move, ask: *If neither clear nor deluded mind comes, what do you do?*

Master Fuke freed himself from the monk's grasp and said: *Tomorrow there will be a formal dinner in Dai-hi Temple.*

Returning back to Master Rinzai, the monk reported the fact.

Master Rinzai said: *I have always thought that this is no ordinary monk.*

Commentary

In his poem Master Fuke expressed the Buddhist attitude toward phenomena. We are always free. When the mind is clear we let it be as it is. When it is deluded we accept the delusion and deal with it, without wasting time wishing for a clearer state. Deluded mind is not separate from Buddha-mind. We move according to the rule of the Universe. Even if the Universe seems at times to be a whirlwind, the Buddhist accepts his part in it and acts accordingly. The last line refers to action. This is the heart of Buddhism. When circumstances demand, the Buddhist acts, naturally and decisively.

One day Master Rinzai directed one of his disciples to test Master Fuke. The disciple grabbed Master Fuke and asked him: *If neither clear nor deluded mind comes what will you do?* How did the Master answer this difficult philosophical problem? He said: *"Tomorrow there will be a formal dinner at Dai-hi Temple."* What will the Master do if neither clear nor deluded mind comes? He will carry on with his life, doing the things that need to be done. He refused to be drawn into an intellectual argument with the monk. He thus demonstrated that the poem he recited was not just an intellectual slogan but a direct expression of his real life.

TWENTY-THREE

One day Master Kyozan Ejaku of the En district was out clearing the fields with Master Isan Reiyu.

Master Kyozan Ejaku said: *This place is low like this. That place is high like that.*

Master Isan Reiyu said: *Water makes all things level. We can make them level with water.*

Master Kyozan Ejaku said: *We should not rely upon water, Master. High places are balanced in being high as they are. Low places are balanced in being low as they are.*

Master Isan affirmed these words.

Commentary

Master Isan's remark illustrates a common misunderstanding of the Buddhist idea of oneness and balance. Yes, it's true that if everything is covered with water it is all balanced and the same. Thus some people make great efforts to ignore the world as it is and cover it with some dream of paradise.

Master Kyozan's viewpoint was more accurate. A high place is balanced as it is. Low places are balanced as they are. Right is balanced as it is. Wrong is balanced as it is. Buddhism affirms the Universe as it is.

Notice that this affirmation is made while the monks are engaged in clearing the fields. Some people might see Master Kyozan's remarks as an attempt to avoid work. If everything is balanced as it is, why is it necessary to try to change anything. However, this way of looking at the problem is a simple confusion of levels of understanding. In the ultimate phase there is just reality, the Universe as it is. On the relative level of ordinary human affairs we can see many things that need to be changed. The two views do not obstruct each other.

In Zazen there is the experience of reality as it is – free of the categories of “to change” or “not to change.” At the same time the experience of reality as it is and the balance that comes with practicing Zazen allow the Buddhist to deal with the situations of the world in a more balanced, realistic way. Although we may intellectually distinguish the ultimate viewpoint and the ordinary viewpoint as an aid to explanation, they are in fact one reality. Thus we can say all things as they are, are balanced. Our efforts to change them are balanced, and our success or failure is also balanced.

TWENTY-FOUR

One day a monk asked Master Daizui Hoshin from the Eki district: *When the eternal fire comes and all three thousand worlds are being destroyed, will this world also be destroyed?*

Master Daizui Hoshin said: *It will be destroyed.*

The monk said: *If this is true I would like to follow circumstances.*

Master Daizui Hoshin said: *Yes, we should follow circumstances.*

Commentary

"We should follow circumstances" is a famous saying of the Chinese Master Joshu Jushin. It means that we should follow the rule of the Universe. The monk seems to have had some doubt about this principle if the circumstances include the destruction of the world. The Master affirmed that we should follow circumstances even if we are on the eve of the great fire. The great fire represents the limits of reality. We can make our plans and efforts, but in the real world things do not always go our way. Our plans may go awry or we may discover we are trying to change something that cannot be changed. The Buddhist attitude is to accept and deal with the reality of the situation, even if that reality is not one we would have chosen.

This attitude is illustrated by the story of the Buddhist monk who was chased by a tiger. The monk ran as fast as he could, but he was no match for the tiger. Soon he found himself trapped between the tiger and a cliff. A little way below the top of the cliff he noticed some vines and, with the tiger close behind, he climbed down to the vines and held on. The vines were not strong enough to support his weight and slowly they began to come loose from the side of the cliff. Just at that moment, with his support giving way and the tiger roaring angrily overhead, the monk noticed some ripe berries. He reached out and put a few in his mouth. The taste was sweet and delicious.

This is the Buddhist attitude. When the circumstances called for the monk to make a fierce effort to escape, he did so. The reality of the situation was that no escape was possible. The monk was able to accept this calmly. This peaceful attitude was the sweet fruit the monk was able to find even in this extreme situation.

TWENTY-FIVE

Master Rakan Keichin of Jizo Temple prepared dinner on the anniversary of the death of his Master, Gensa Shibi. He invited Master Ho-on to share the dinner with him that evening.

When Master Ho-on looked at the place where, according to custom, a representation of Master Gensa Shibi should have been placed, he could see nothing. Finally he asked Master Rakan: *Aren't there any images of the Master?*

Then Master Rakan bowed down with joined hands and said: *Look!*

Master Ho-on said: *From the beginning there has never been any image of the Master.*

Master Rakan Keichin said: *It seems as if you have never seen the Master's image at all.*

Commentary

Master Ho-on Gensoku was puzzled when he failed to see an image of Master Gensa in its customary place. He asked Master Rakan if there were any images of Gensa Shibi in the temple. In answer to this question Master Rakan bowed deeply toward the place where the image would normally have been. His intention was to indicate that the spirit of Gensa Shibi was always before him whether there was an actual physical image there or not.

Furthermore, Master Rakan's sincere behavior was itself the image of Master Gensa Shibi. The spirit of the late Master was standing there right in front of Master Ho-on, but he failed to see it. Therefore Master Rakan criticized him saying, *"It seems as if you have never seen the Master's image at all."*

TWENTY-SIX

One day Master Nan-yo Echu of Kotaku Temple in Saikei was asked by Emperor Shukuso of the Tang Dynasty: *What is the state of balance in Zazen that is called "mujo?"*

The Master said: *Faithful supporter; go forward, treading on the head of Vairocana Buddha.*

The Emperor said: *I don't understand.*

Master Nan-yo Echu said: *Don't imagine that you are the Pure Universal Body.*

Commentary

Master Nan-yo Echu, a renowned Buddhist Master during the Tang Dynasty, was given the title National Master Daisho. Emperor Shukuso asked him about the state in Zazen called "*mujo*," which was used to describe the tranquil state in Zazen. *Mu* means "without" and *jo* means "quarrel," "conflict," or "instability," and thus *mujo* refers to the tranquil and stable state in Zazen. When the Emperor asked about this state, Master Nan-yo Echu gave an unexpected answer. He said: "*Go forward, treading on the head of Vairocana Buddha.*" Vairocana Buddha represents the sun, and just as the sun governs the heavens, Vairocana Buddha can be thought of as representing the Supreme Buddha.

Master Nan-yo was telling the Emperor to go forward without worrying about philosophical concepts and theories. The Master was suggesting that the Emperor should proceed with his practice and not worry about attaining *mujo*, the state of tranquility. This is a point that causes trouble for many practitioners. They have an image of what their practice should be and are disappointed if their actual practice does not live up to their expectations. Many people think that their practice should be very peaceful and quiet. And it is true that this state exists in Zazen and deepens with practice.

However, it is not the only state in Zazen. Sometimes many thoughts bubble up from the unconscious, sometimes we are very restless and anything but peaceful and tranquil. These states are also Zazen. We should not try to avoid them any more than we should seek after the tranquil state. We should just proceed with our practice.

The Emperor was unable to understand the Master's words and said so directly. He did not try to appear more learned than he was. The problem was

he was trying to understand Buddhism intellectually. This is a common attitude in the study of Buddhism.

The Master said: "*Don't imagine that you are the Pure Universal Body.*" This refers to Buddhist theories regarding Buddha-nature. Again the Master was telling the Emperor not to try to impose theories on the reality of his life and practice.

Theories can serve a useful function, but they can also become traps if we let them interfere with the experience of reality itself. Explanations of such concepts as *mujo* and the *Pure Universal Body* are not so important. To live really in our day-to-day life is important. This is the life of a Buddhist.

TWENTY-SEVEN

Master Rinzai Gigen of Rinzai Temple in the Chin district had been living in the order of Master Obaku Kiun for three years, and his conduct was sincere and pure. The *Shuso* (head monk) praised him by saying: *Even though he is a student who began Buddhist study only recently, he is different from other monks.*

Then he persuaded Master Rinzai to go to the Master of the Temple and ask a question: *What is the great purpose of Buddhism that has been transmitted from authentic master to authentic disciple?*

Master Obaku struck Master Rinzai at once, even before he had finished speaking. On asking the question three times, Master Obaku struck him each time.

Then Master Rinzai went back to the *Shuso* and said: *It was my good fortune to receive your benevolence. You made me ask the Master a question. I asked the question three times and each time he hit me with his stick. I deeply regret that I am unable to understand the profound meaning of the Master's behavior, because my own poor state hinders me. Therefore I would like to leave the temple for a while.*

The *Shuso* said: *If you want to leave the temple you have to say goodbye to the Master. Then you may leave the temple.*

The *Shuso* visited the Master's room beforehand and said: *The young student who asked you the question has the ability to follow the rule of the Universe. When he comes to you to say goodbye, please be good enough to offer him some teaching. If we prune him, he will become a great tree and provide cool shade for people of the world.*

Master Rinzai went to the Master's private room to say his farewells.

The Master said: *Do not go to any place other than the one I will tell you. Go to see Master Ko-an Daigu.*

When Master Rinzai arrived at the temple of Master Daigu, the Master asked him where he had come from.

Master Rinzai said: *Obaku.*

Master Daigu said: *What words did Master Obaku use?*

Master Rinzai said: *I asked a question three times, and I was struck three times. I don't know whether I did something wrong or not.*

Master Daigu said: *Master Obaku had such a kind heart, like that of an old woman, that he completely wore himself out for you. But you cannot recognize his kindness. You say that you don't know whether you made a mistake or not.*

Hearing these words Master Rinzai attained the truth.

Then he said: *There is not so much to Master Obaku's Buddhism after all.*

Master Daigu grasped Master Rinzai and said: *You, a child of a demon, in a bed of urine. Just a moment ago you said you couldn't recognize whether you had made a mistake or not. Now you say there is not so much to his Buddhism. What principle do you have? Say something now! Say something now!*

Master Rinzai struck Master Daigu's side three times with his fist.

Master Daigu, leaving him, said: *I will have nothing more to do with you.*

Leaving the temple, Master Rinzai went back to Mount Obaku.

Master Obaku asked: *You go back and forth many times. How can you have the time to attain the truth?*

Master Rinzai said: *I came back here just because your mind is so kind, like that of an old woman.* Master Rinzai saluted the Master by prostrating to him, and then stood up and remained standing there.

Master Obaku asked: *Where did you go and return from?*

Master Rinzai said: *Following the Master's suggestion, I went to the temple of Master Daigu.*

Master Obaku asked: *What words did Daigu use?*

Master Rinzai told him of his encounter with Master Daigu.

Master Obaku said: *If you come here I will strike you at once.*

Master Rinzai said: *Why do you wait for me to come? I can be struck at once.* Then he slapped Master Obaku's face with the palm of his hand.

Master Obaku said: *This strange, mad man, coming to my temple to rub the beard of a tiger.*

Master Rinzai cried *Katsu!* at once.

Master Obaku said to his *Jisha* (assistant): *Take this strange, mad man to the Zazen Hall to live.*

Commentary

What is the great meaning of Buddhism which has been transmitted from authentic master to authentic disciple? Before he had even finished asking the question, Rinzai was struck by the Master. Master Obaku struck him because his attitude was too abstract. He had to learn that Buddhism is not just some abstract formula, but practical facts and real situations. Rinzai left Master Obaku's temple and went to receive instruction from Master Ko-an Daigu.

After he had told the story of his departure from Master Obaku's temple, Master Daigu said that far from being too severe in his treatment of Rinzai, Master Obaku had been as soft hearted as an old woman. He said that intellectual ponderings could never match Master Obaku's kindness. This different perspective allowed Master Rinzai to see the situation clearly. He said there is not so much to Master Obaku's Buddhism after all. And this is perfectly true. The buddha state is simple and natural. It is when we are unbalanced and deluded that things and mental phenomena seem complicated.

When Rinzai went back to Master Obaku's temple, his behavior indicated that he had broken through his abstract understanding. His Buddhism had become as real as a slap in the face.

TWENTY-EIGHT

One day a monk asked Master Chikan of Kyogen Temple: *What is the truth?*

Master Kyogen said: *Amid the silence of withered trees, we can hear the moaning of dragons.*

The monk said: *What is a person in the state of truth?*

Master Kyogen said: *Skulls that have eyeholes.*

Thereafter, a monk asked Master Sekiso: *What does the moaning of dragons amid the silence of withered trees show?*

Master Sekiso said: *It shows that there is still some trace of vitality.*

The monk said: *What do eyeholes in skulls show?*

Master Sekiso said: *They show that there is still a trace of something human.*

On another occasion, a monk asked Master Sozan: *What does the moaning of dragons among withered trees show?*

Master Sozan said: *It shows that our life blood has never stopped flowing.*

The monk said: *What do eyeholes in skulls show?*

Master Sozan said: *They show that there is still something that has not dried up.*

The monk said: *I wonder if anyone can hear the dragons moaning.*

Master Sozan said: *Over the whole face of the earth there is no-one who does not hear them.*

The monk said: *I wonder what the dragons are saying when they moan.*

Master Sozan said: *Even though we do not know what they are saying, all those who hear it free themselves of something.*

Commentary

In ancient China, people used the word *ryugin*, "the moaning of dragons," as a symbol of something mystical in nature, in the Universe itself. The expression *koboku ryugin*, "the moaning of dragons amid withered trees," conjures up an

image of a lonely and desolate landscape of withered trees, where we feel we can hear something that is not a sound. This metaphor entered into Buddhist explanations. The moaning of dragons represents not a sound, but something that cannot be heard with the ears alone; that is, quietness, nature, the Universe, or reality itself.

In this koan, the monk wanted to know what is the truth. Master Kyogen answered, using the ancient Chinese metaphor of dragon's moans, that the truth is something that we experience, but cannot quite hear, cannot quite grasp. The monk wants a more concrete explanation; what is a person who has realized the truth like? The Master answers using another ancient metaphor; in someone who has realized the truth, something is noticeable, in the same way that when we look at a skull, the eyeholes convey to us some subtle suggestion of life.

Later, a monk asked Master Sekiso Keisho for clarification on the meaning of these two metaphorical expressions. Master Sekiso explained that dragons' moans suggest a trace of something vital, and eyeholes in skulls suggest a trace of something human. The truth is subtle and impossible to grasp intellectually.

On another occasion, a monk asked Master Sozan Honjaku to explain the meaning of dragons' groans amid withered trees. Master Sozan explained that it means that the lifeblood, the true teachings of Gautama Buddha, has never been broken. The monk then asked for an explanation of eyeholes in skulls. Master Sozan explained that this metaphor represents the fact that the truth is always with us – it never disappears.

The monk then moved on to a more practical question: can anyone hear the dragon's moaning? The Master replied that we all hear it; the truth is evident everywhere. What is it saying? What it is saying is beyond the grasp of our analytical mind, and when we hear the sound of the truth, we free ourselves from our intellectual view of the world and enter reality itself. The sounds of nature itself are the teachings of Gautama Buddha.

TWENTY-NINE

Master Zengen Chuko in the Tan district one day visited a house with Master Dogo Enchi to convey their condolences. At that moment Master Zengen, patting the coffin, said: *Is it alive or dead?*

Master Dogo said: *I will not say alive or dead.*

Master Zengen said: *Why won't you say?*

Master Dogo said: *I will never say. I will never say.*

On the way back to the temple Master Zengen said: *Master! Please give me your answer now. If you don't, I will hit you.*

Master Dogo said: *You can hit me if you like, but I will never say.*

Then Master Zengen hit Master Dogo several times with his fist.

On returning to the temple, Master Dogo said: *It would be better for you to leave this temple, but if the Shuso hears that you are leaving it will cause problems.*

After Master Dogo died, Master Zengen went to the temple of Master Sekiso Keisho. He told Master Sekiso about the incident and asked the Master for his teachings.

Master Sekiso said: *I will not say it is alive; I will not say it is dead.*

Master Zengen said: *Why won't you say?*

Master Sekiso said: *I will never say. I will never say.*

On hearing these words, Master Zengen realized something.

Commentary

Zengen patted a coffin and asked Master Dogo whether the body inside was alive or dead. Master Dogo didn't want to limit the real situation to Zengen's concepts of life and death, so he refused to answer. Zengen's need for an answer to this question was so great that he said he would hit his master unless he provided an answer to the question immediately.

The Master said that Zengen could hit him if he wanted, but he would still refuse to answer. So Zengen hit the Master with his fist but still got no answer to his question.

I'm afraid many of us are like Zengen. If we found someone we thought knew the answer to the problem of life and death we would be willing to do anything to get the answer. Usually such people are all too willing to provide the answers we seek. Master Dogo was different. He refused to reduce the real situation to the categories that Zengen insisted on.

After they returned to the temple Master Dogo suggested that Zengen leave the temple. Perhaps he thought that Zengen's state was too disturbed at that time for him to continue studying at the temple.

Later, after Master Dogo had died Zengen asked the same question to Master Sekiso and received the same answer. However, the man who heard the answer was different. This time, instead of pursuing his demand for an intellectual answer to the point of violence, Zengen was able to open himself to the reality that his teachers had been trying to get him to experience for himself.

THIRTY

Master Sozan Honjaku in the Bu district was leaving Mount Tozan.

Master Tozan asked: *Where do you want to go?*

Master Sozan said: *I am going to a place where there is no change.*

Master Tozan asked: *How can we leave the place where there is no change?*

Master Sozan said: *Even if I leave this place, there can be no change.*

Commentary

Master Sozan (called Great Master Gensho in the text) wanted to leave Master Tozan's temple. When Master Tozan asked him where he wanted to go Sozan replied that he wanted to go to a place where there is no change. This expression means the balanced state, or enlightenment.

Master Tozan regarded his temple as such a place, so he asked Sozan how it was possible to leave this place, where there is no change. Master Sozan replied: "*Even if I leave this place, there can be no change.*" Ultimately, to go or not is just a fact in reality. Master Sozan was confident that the balanced state would remain regardless of whether he was in Master Tozan's temple or not.

Master Tozan's question: "*How can we leave the place where there is no change?*" could also be taken to mean that, since we are already living in reality, why is it necessary to make any changes? The fact is that we are always living in reality. There is no escape. Human beings have the marvelous ability to become "lost" in thought and fantasy. We then moan about our suffering and struggle to get back to reality. But through all this we never leave reality. Becoming lost, thought, fantasy, and complaining are all included in reality. Practice is not a method for attaining reality, it is the expression of reality.

The fact that we are always living in reality does not excuse us from the demands of everyday life. Everyday life is ultimate reality, although our perceptions of it may be distorted. We may go and come as life demands, but we never leave reality.

THIRTY-ONE

Quoting:

Master Tokuzan Senkan in the Tei district gave an informal lecture to an assembly in his private room. He said: *Tonight I don't want to have any discussion. If there is anyone who wants to ask a question I will strike him thirty times with my stick.*

Straight away, a monk walked forward and prostrated himself in front of the Master.

The Master struck him immediately.

The monk said: *I haven't asked a question yet. Why did you strike me?*

The Master said: *Where have you come from?*

The monk said: *I am from Korea.*

The Master said: *I would have liked to have struck you thirty times with a stick before you even got off the boat.*

Commentary

Master Tokuzan Senkan (called Great Master Gensho in the text) said that he didn't want to have any discussion that evening and he would strike anyone who tried to discuss Buddhism. The Master's intent was to demonstrate that the ultimate state in Buddhism is not a matter of discussion, not a matter of intellectual analysis.

When the monk came forward and prostrated himself before the Master, he may have intended to express his Buddhist state by prostrating himself without saying anything, and so he thought the Master had been too hasty in striking him. On seeing his prostrations the Master had in fact affirmed the monk's behavior. Striking the monk was the Master's answer.

Master Tokuzan asked the monk where he had come from, which was a typical way to ask a monk about his practice up to that point, and his final words say that he would have liked to have taught the monk even before he came to China.

THIRTY-TWO

Veteran monk Fu of Taigen City asked Master Kozan: *Where are the nostrils that have existed since before your father and mother were born?*

Master Kozan said: *They have appeared just now. Where were they?*

The veteran monk did not affirm the Master's words, and said: *You should ask me the same question. I would like to answer for you.*

The Master said: *In the time before your mother and father were born where were your nostrils?*

The veteran monk just fanned himself.

Commentary

In Buddhist stories the nostrils are often a symbol of life. The phrase "*before your father and mother were born*" indicates the eternal past. So the monk was asking Master Kozan about his life in eternity.

Master Kozan replied, "*They have appeared just now.*" This expresses the Buddhist teaching that reality is just here and now. There is only the present moment. Even the eternal past and the eternal future exist in this present moment.

The monk thought this answer was too abstract. When the Master asked the monk the same question, the monk replied, not with words, but with a concrete action in the present. The monk's actual life at the present was his answer to the question.

THIRTY-THREE

One day a monk asked Master Sozan Honjaku: *I have heard that an ancient Master said "Everyone who falls down on the ground must rely on the ground to stand up again." How do we "fall down"?*

Master Sozan said: *When we affirm the real situation, we know.*

The monk said: *How do we "stand up"?*

The Master said: *Just stand up.*

Commentary

"Everyone who falls down on the ground must rely on the ground to stand up again." This means that the circumstances of the real world sometimes make us fall, make us confused and lost. In order to stand up again, in order to find our way again, we have to rely on the circumstances of the real world. If we try to escape the pain and difficulty of living in the real world by escaping into dreams and fantasies we will never be able to fully stand or walk as we should.

The monk asked about falling down. The Master said when we affirm the real situation, accept the fact, we notice that we have fallen down. The monk then asked about standing up. To *stand up* means to regain the balanced state, our original nature. Master Sozan said that we just have to stand up. It is a simple action.

To act simply in the present moment is to be a buddha. We cannot attain the balanced state by will-power, or by thinking about it. The will and intellect are functions of the mind. But the balanced state is a condition of the whole body and mind. The matchless gate to this state, this real life, is Zazen.

THIRTY-FOUR

One day a government officer sent an offering to Master Ungo Doyo of Ungo mountain in the Ko district, asking: *It is said that Gautama Buddha had secret talk, and Mahakasyapa did not conceal anything. What is the secret talk of Gautama Buddha?*

The Master called out: *Officer!*

The officer replied.

The Master said: *Do you understand?*

The officer said: *I don't understand.*

The Master said: *Not understanding is the secret talk of Gautama Buddha. And understanding is Master Mahakasyapa not concealing anything.*

Commentary

Gautama Buddha's secret talk – his non-verbal communication – suggests his action in picking up a flower and winking an eye before the assembly of hundreds on Vulture Peak. Mahakasyapa not concealing anything – his intuitive perception of the Buddha's actions – suggests his breaking into a smile as if he knew beforehand that the Buddha would pick up a flower and wink an eye. The story is from the Lotus Sutra.

The officer asked about the secret talk of Gautama Buddha. He felt there was a contradiction between this “*secret talk*” and the saying that Mahakasyapa (the leader of the Buddhist order after Gautama Buddha's death) did not conceal anything.

In the end, it is impossible for us to describe reality with words. For this reason, Gautama Buddha kept silence. The secret talk of Gautama Buddha may then be taken to mean the expression of reality itself. We are always living in reality. The truth is always with us here in this very moment. Even our delusions and lack of understanding are expressions of reality.

From one viewpoint reality may be mysterious and unexplainable, from another it is very clear and simple. But at the same time reality always manifests itself. Therefore it is not necessary to conceal anything, and so Master Mahakasyapa smiled.

The Master called out to the officer and the officer responded. This natural behaviour is real conduct, but the officer could not understand what the Master

was showing him. The Master explained that what the officer could not understand is called reality, but at the same time, even though the officer could not understand reality, it always exists here and now. For this reason, it has been described as Master Mahakasyapa not concealing anything. This natural behavior is what Master Mahakasyapa did not conceal.

THIRTY-FIVE

Master Tosu Daido on Mount Tosu was asked by a monk one day: *What was Gautama Buddha's state described with the words, "The ten kinds of body in the self-regulated?"*

The Master descended from his Zazen platform and stood with his hands in *shashu*.

The monk said: *What distance is there between ordinary people and the sacred?*

The Master descended from the Zazen platform again and stood there with his hands in *shashu*.

Commentary

The monk asked about Gautama Buddha's state which was described with the words "*jushin chogo*" – the ten kinds of body in a self-regulated person. It was said in ancient Buddhist writings that in the balanced and controlled state of self-regulation, Gautama Buddha showed ten different bodily forms. This suggests that Gautama Buddha was in control of himself and thus able to freely use the so-called ten aspects of his being.

The Master demonstrated this state by descending from the Zazen platform and standing in front of the monk in *shashu* (hands locked together in front of the chest). The Master standing there in front of the monk was the actual embodiment of "*the ten kinds of body in the self-regulated.*" Thus the state is not something strange and far off, it is the actual situation here and now.

The monk then asked about the distance between ordinary people and the sacred. This question comes from an attitude that is very widespread. People usually think there is a great gulf between ordinary life and the sacred. Buddhism sees no such division. Ultimate reality, or what we might call "*the sacred,*" exists fully and completely in every moment and in every thing.

When the monk asked his question the Master once again jumped down from his platform and stood in *shashu*. Look at him there. Can you see anything that corresponds to the categories of sacred and profane, or can you see reality itself staring you in the face at this very moment?

THIRTY-SIX

One day a monk asked Master Tokuzan Tokukai in the Ro district: *Who can hear the Buddha preaching to the Order on Vulture Peak?*

The Master said: *Monk, you can hear it.*

The monk said: *I do not understand. What kinds of things were discussed on Vulture Peak?*

The Master said: *You have understood it exactly.*

Commentary

The story about the Buddha preaching on Vulture Peak to a grand host of buddhas, future buddhas, and celestial beings is contained in the Lotus Sutra. The monk wanted to know what kind of beings had the mystical ability to hear such profound teachings.

The Master replied that the monk himself could hear such preaching. The monk said he couldn't understand, and asked further about the content of the preaching. The Master said that he had already understood it.

The monk was looking for his own true nature on far-off Vulture Peak. The Master insisted that the profound truth of Buddhism, that is reality itself, existed at that very moment in the monk's questions and confusion.

The ultimate reality which the monk sought was nowhere to be found but in the monk's actual life and behavior.

THIRTY-SEVEN

One day a monk asked Master Kenpo in the Etsu district: *Buddhas in all directions enter nirvana through one way. What street are they on, I wonder?*

The Master, picking up a stick and pointing up the street, said: *They are here.*

Commentary

The monk's question contains both the idealistic and materialistic viewpoints. The idealistic phase is the idea of buddhas in all directions entering nirvana by one way.

The materialistic phase is represented by the question "*what street are they on?*" The monk is puzzled by the difference between the sublime world of buddhas in all directions and the everyday world of streets and houses. In other words, the relationship between the sacred and the profane.

Master Eshu Kenpo picked up a stick and pointed toward the street. "*They are here,*" he said. In this actual place here and now. In the place before our eyes we can find the gate to nirvana, because "*buddhas in all directions*" is just another name for reality itself. And whatever delusions we may be caught up in at the moment, reality always exists here and now.

THIRTY-EIGHT

Master Seppo Gison on Mount Seppo in the Fuku district pointed to a hearth and said to Master Gensa: *Inside this hearth, all buddhas in the past, present and future are preaching Gautama Buddha's truth.*

Master Gensa said: *The regulations in the Emperor's sanctuary have recently been tightened.*

Master Seppo said: *In what way?*

Master Gensa said: *It is forbidden for anyone to plunder a street market.*

Commentary

Master Seppo could see the preaching of all buddhas in the silence of the fire. Master Gensa felt that Seppo's comments were a little self-satisfied. He replied that regulations had been tightened in the Emperor's sanctuary.

When Master Seppo asked him what had happened, Master Gensa said that it was now forbidden to steal anything from a street market. This describes a concrete situation. It is a fact that all things and phenomena are regulated in reality. Real situations have limits, restrictions. We often find it easy to overcome restrictions in our minds.

However, when we put our ideas into practice, we soon find what the limits are in the real situation. This is what often happens to idealists. They become disillusioned after coming into contact with the limitations of reality. This in itself is not such a bad thing. It is important not to be trapped by ideas and ideals. But what often happens is that after seeing the flaws in their former position, the one-time idealists completely abandon their former ideas and embrace the materialistic viewpoint with equal fervor. This is also an unbalanced situation.

The real situation is that limitations and freedom both exist. The buddhas in the silent fire and the regulations of the Emperor's sanctuary are both real.

THIRTY-NINE

One day a monk asked Master Kyosei Dofu of Ryusaku Temple in the Ko district: *Is the first day of the New Year related to Buddhism?*

The Master said: *Yes it is.*

The monk said: *What is the Buddhist teaching about New Year's Day?*

The Master said: *New Year's Day is the beginning of happiness and all things become new.*

The monk said: *I thank the Master for his answer.*

The Master said: *Today I am not so clever.*

On another day, the monk asked Master Myokyo: *Is the first day of the New Year related to Buddhism?*

Master Myokyo said: *No it is not.*

The monk said: *Every year is a good year and every day is a good day. Why do you say it is not?*

Master Myokyo said: *An old man of the Cho family drinks sake and an old man of the Ri family gets drunk.*

The monk said: *Your words were sufficiently controlled and great at the beginning, but now they are very small like something with the head of a dragon and the tail of a snake.*

Master Myokyo said: *Today my mind is not very clear.*

Commentary

Master Kyosei said that New Year's Day is related to Buddhism and Master Myokyo (Sosen Shikan) said that it is not. These answers seem to be completely contradictory, so who was right? We can say that both were right. Reality is complicated, and not logical. Greeting each other and saying "Happy New Year!" is itself Buddhist conduct, and makes the New Year fresh and new.

However, even though there is New Year's Day, everyday life goes on, and January 1st is just another day; many people drink alcohol and get drunk.

Master Myokyo quoted an old saying about the Cho family and the Ri family, which was used to indicate an illogical situation. He wanted to suggest

the complexity of the real situation. He chose not to respond to the monk's criticism of his words, perhaps feeling that the monk's attitude was too abstract.

The Masters' statements, "*Today I am not so clever*" and "*Today my mind is not very clear*" indicate their reluctance to discuss Buddhism intellectually.

FORTY

The Second Master of Hoju Temple in the Chin district held a ceremony to mark becoming the Master of his own temple. Then Master Sansho Enen pushed a monk out in front of the Second Master. The Second Master struck the monk at once.

Master Sansho Enen said: *If you teach others like this, you will not only cause this monk to lose an eye, but you will make all the people in the Chin district blind.*

The Second Master threw his stick on the floor and went back to his private room at once.

Commentary

Master Sansho criticized the Second Master of the temple for striking the monk. It is true that some masters used such behavior to shake their disciples out of their abstractions and get them to look at the real world.

It is also true that such behavior can come from a melodramatic attitude which masks itself as stern Buddhist practice.

The Second Master did not accept this criticism and so returned to his private room.

FORTY-ONE

Quoting:

One day a monk asked Master Sekito Kisen on Mount Nangaku: *What was Master Bodhidharma's intention in coming from the west to China?*

Master Sekito Kisen said: *Ask the pillars outside.*

The monk said: *I cannot understand your answer at all.*

Master Sekito Kisen said: *I am also unable to understand the situation if I think about it.*

Commentary

The monk asked what Master Bodhidharma's intention or plan was in coming to China from India. This question was frequently used to ask about the aim of Buddhist life. The Master said to ask the pillars outside the room. Temples in China and Japan have large overhanging eaves, supported at intervals by wooden pillars.

These pillars would have been in the corridor, just outside the Master's room, standing in their place in silence. And if the monk did ask the pillars what would they say? They would answer with reality itself. Whether the monk would be able to hear this answer or not is another matter.

The monk said he could not understand the answer at all. Master Sekito said that he was also unable to understand if he thought about it. This was not a confession of a shortcoming on the part of the Master. We experience real situations with the whole body/mind.

Thinking about Master Bodhidharma's intention is different from experiencing the actual circumstances in which he lived and moved. What was the difference between the monk and the Master? The monk was still trying to understand Buddhism on the basis of the intellect. The Master understood that we experience reality with our whole being.

FORTY-TWO

Master Kyosei Dofu asked a monk: *Where have you come from?*

The monk said: *From Sampo.*

Master Kyosei Dofu said: *Where were you in the summer?*

The monk said: *Goho.*

Master Kyosei Dofu said: *You deserve to be struck thirty times with a stick, but I will not insist on that.*

The monk said: *What have I done wrong?*

Master Kyosei Dofu said: *You seem to be just wandering from one temple to another.*

Commentary

"Sampo" and "Goho" are the names of mountain peaks where temples are located. The monk had been traveling from temple to temple. The Master said that he would not insist on administering to the monk the punishment he deserved for such behavior, which the Master felt was too superficial and lax. The monk was a kind of spiritual tourist going from place to place without ever settling down to serious practice and study.

Today we see many people who have a similar attitude. They visit many different centers and teachers, but it seems they learn very little from their efforts. The study and practice of Buddhism cannot be treated like a hobby; it requires a sustained and focused effort studying under someone who has learned the Buddhist way. Merely accumulating knowledge about Buddhism is different from practicing Buddhism itself.

FORTY-THREE

When Master Kiso Chijo of Kisu Temple on Mount Ro was cutting grass, the Master of another temple arrived. Just then they noticed a snake near them. Without hesitating, Master Chijo cut the snake in two with the sickle.

The Master of the other temple said: *I have heard of your reputation for a long time, but now I see that you are just a Buddhist monk with rough behavior.*

Master Chijo said: *Am I the one who is rough, or is it you?*

The other Master said: *Then what do you mean by "rough"?*

Master Chijo stuck the sickle into the ground, handle first.

The other Master said: *What is "not rough"?*

Master Chijo acted as if he were killing a snake.

The other Master said: *Maybe you are right; I will follow your example.*

Master Chijo said: *I will allow you to follow my example for a while, but do you realize why I killed the snake?*

The other Master did not say anything.

Commentary

One of the Buddhist precepts is "Do not kill." Master Kiso Chijo was criticized for his rough behavior in violation of this precept, but he questioned what kind of behavior was "rough." Then he demonstrated rough behavior by sticking the sickle into the ground handle first. This is unnatural behavior. The sickle was not designed for such use and it serves no useful function.

When the other Master asked him to demonstrate behavior that was not rough, Master Chijo acted out the killing of the snake. There is a precept against killing, but in some situations it may be necessary. The snake posed a threat, so Master Chijo killed it without hesitating.

Thus the Buddhist attitude towards the precepts is somewhat different from that of Christians toward the ten commandments. The commandments exist above and apart from any particular situation and must be followed regardless of the situation. The precepts are guides to correct behavior, but the Buddhist does not follow them blindly. Right action can arise only in the actual situation.

Moral behavior is not to follow an abstract concept of what is “right,” but just “to do right” in the real situation. In certain situations, this may mean that we break a precept.

This does not mean a Buddhist should be lax in trying to follow the precepts. When the body/mind is balanced and in its natural state through the regular practice of Zazen, we act intuitively and right in the actual situation. The precepts act as a map of the terrain, but they are not the terrain itself.

FORTY-FOUR

When Master Isan Reiyu went to the Lecture Hall to give his lecture, a monk stepped out in front of him and said: *Master, please preach a sermon for these many Buddhist monks.*

The Master said: *I have become completely exhausted from teaching you.*

The monk prostrated himself in front of the Master.

Commentary

As Master Isan Reiyu entered the Lecture Hall a monk came forward and politely requested him to preach a sermon for the monks. However, a Buddhist Master does not just preach during the sermon. All of his behavior is a way of teaching his students. Thus Master Isan said that he was exhausted from teaching the monks, even before his formal lecture began. The monk prostrated himself as a sign of gratitude for his Master's teaching and efforts on behalf of the monks.

The Buddhist sermon may be used to explain the theories and concepts of Buddhism. This is an important part of our Buddhist life – but there is much more. A Buddhist Master teaches not just with his intellect but with his whole body/mind; not just with his sermons but with his daily life.

To learn Buddhism means to learn it with the whole body/mind. This includes the intellect, but not only the intellect.

FORTY-FIVE

One day a monk asked Master Gensa Shibi: *It is not necessary for me to listen to the theory of the three kinds of Buddhism or the twelve kinds of Buddhist Scriptures. What was the intention of Master Bodhidharma, who came to China from India in the west?*

Master Gensa Shibi said: *The theory of the three kinds of Buddhism and twelve kinds of Buddhist Scriptures are all useless.*

Commentary

Buddhist scholars have divided Buddhism into three different paths, or ways, and they have divided the scriptures into twelve different types. Please do not ask the names of all these types and ways!

The monk realized that such knowledge was not an essential part of Buddhism. He wanted to know the true meaning, the essence of Buddhism.

To find the true meaning of Buddhism we must transcend all such concepts. We must experience reality directly. We must practice Zazen.

FORTY-SIX

One day a monk asked Master Joshu Jushin: *What is Joshu?*

The Master said: *It has an east gate, south gate, west gate, and north gate.*

The monk said: *I did not ask you about that.*

Master Joshu said: *You asked me about Joshu itself.*

Commentary

The monk asked about the essential nature of Master Joshu. The word “Joshu” can also mean the capital of the Jo district. So the Master replied that it has an east gate, a south gate, a west gate, and a north gate. The monk did not understand the Master’s meaning in replying in such a way.

Master Joshu said, “*You asked me about Joshu itself.*” To know Joshu completely means to know reality itself. To know the reality of one thing is to know the reality of all things. Thus to know the reality of Master Joshu is to know the reality of the city Joshu.

FORTY-SEVEN

One day, just as Master Isan Reiyu crossed his legs to begin Zazen practice, he pointed to his shoes and said to Master Kyozan Ejaku: *Those shoes carry the heavy weight of others throughout the day; they cannot refuse it.*

Master Kyozan said: *In ancient times, even in the temples of Jetavana-vihara, Gautama Buddha preached only this one matter.*

Master Isan said: *Your words are not sufficient. Please say something more.*

Master Kyozan said: *In the cold season, even wearing socks in our shoes is not too much of a luxury for them.*

Commentary

In Zazen Halls in China and Japan, the monks sit on raised platforms to practice. In preparing to sit, the monk sits on his cushion on the edge of the platform, takes off his shoes, and places them under the platform directly beneath him. He then draws his legs up onto the platform, and swivels round one hundred and eighty degrees to face the wall and starts to practice Zazen.

During this process, Master Isan pointed at his shoes, and said that they receive the heavy weight of the wearer throughout the day; they are unable to refuse to do so. In this statement we can see a simple fact of reality: shoes bear the weight of their owners and make no complaint.

We can also see some mental factor in the statement. Master Isan seems to have compassion for the shoes and their hard duty. He seems to regard them as sentient beings. Thus reality always contains physical and mental factors. Or in other words, the one reality can be seen from idealistic and materialistic viewpoints.

Master Kyozan said that this was exactly what Gautama Buddha had taught. In Gautama Buddha's time there was strong debate between the idealism of the Brahmins and the cold objectivity of their opponents, the materialists. Gautama Buddha's teaching was the Middle Way between these two viewpoints. His teaching incorporated both viewpoints, while giving final authority to neither. Reality is neither matter nor spirit; it is ineffable. This ineffable reality can be seen from idealistic or materialistic perspectives.

Master Isan was not satisfied with Master Kyozan's statement. He wanted Master Kyozan to express his own opinion without relying on the ancient words of Gautama Buddha.

In Master Kyozan's last statement we can again see an expression of a simple fact: in cold weather socks are worn. We can also see some expression of human value or meaning that this simple situation contains.

FORTY-EIGHT

One day Master Gensa Shibi asked his disciple to take a letter to Master Seppo Gison. Master Seppo Gison received the letter while he was just on his way to the Lecture Hall to give a lecture. He opened the letter and looked at it, but the letter was only a sheet of blank paper. In the Lecture Hall, Master Seppo showed the blank paper to the assembly and said: *Do you understand this?*

Then, after a short pause he said: *Haven't you heard it said that excellent people, though separated by thousands of miles, have a common attitude?*

Hearing these words, the disciple returned to Master Gensa and repeated the words to his Master.

Master Gensa said: *An old Buddhist Master on the top of the mountain passed over the matter but he did not recognize the fact.*

Commentary

Master Seppo was senior to Master Gensa in the Buddhist order, but he was a little too serious in his outlook, whereas Master Gensa was more practical, down-to-earth, and dynamic. He sent a blank message to Master Seppo as something of a joke to see what his reaction would be.

When Master Seppo showed the paper to the assembly and asked if they could understand it, he was not being critical, but asking the assembly whether they realized that there is something that cannot be expressed with words.

In his next comment, he indicated that, although separated by a great distance, he and Master Gensa both lived in the truth, and so could understand each other.

The messenger returned to Master Gensa with these comments, but Master Gensa was not satisfied with the reply. He thought that Master Seppo's comments were too abstract and serious. He had not acknowledged his joke.

FORTY-NINE

Master Tozan Ryokai asked a monk: *Where have you come from?*

The monk said: *I came here after enjoying traveling in the mountains.*

The Master said: *Have you arrived at the top of the mountain?*

The monk said: *Yes I have.*

The Master said: *Is there anyone on the top of the mountain?*

The monk said: *There is no-one.*

The Master said: *Then you haven't arrived at the top of the mountain.*

The monk said: *If I have not reached the top, how can I recognize that there is no-one there?*

The Master said: *Reverend monk, why don't you stay here in this temple?*

The monk said: *It is not that I refuse to stay in your temple, but there is a person in India who does not affirm my staying here.*

The Master said: *I suspect that this monk is excellent!*

Commentary

When asked where he had come from, the monk said that he had been enjoying traveling in the mountains. This suggests an attitude different from the usual Buddhist monk; he seemed rather relaxed and not trying to get something. So the Master asked him if he had arrived at the top of the mountain – if he had attained the truth or not. The monk replied that he had.

Master Tozan decided to test the monk and asked him if there was anyone on the top of the mountain – whether his state of truth was the non-discriminative or non-intellectual state where we do not divide reality into parts. When the monk said there was no one at the top, the Master could not feel anything in the monk's reply to suggest that he had attained the truth.

The monk insisted, saying that he could only know that there was no one there after he had arrived at the top. In other words, although we attain the truth as a person, the state of truth itself is the state prior to dividing reality into parts.

The Master realized that the monk had attained the truth and asked him to stay at the temple.

The monk replied that he had no objection to staying in the temple but there was someone in India who did not affirm the decision to stay there. The "*person in India*" means Gautama Buddha. Thus the monk was saying that his state was the same as Gautama Buddha's and that his Buddhist intuition was telling him that he should not stay in this temple.

FIFTY

Master Sekiro of the Fun district was asked by a monk one day: *I haven't recognized my original nature yet. Master, please show me in some way.*

The Master said: *I, Sekiro, do not have any ears.*

The monk said: *I recognize it is my own mistake.*

The Master said: *I, an old monk, have also made a mistake.*

The monk said: *Where is the Master's mistake?*

The Master said: *My mistake exists at the place where your mistake is.*

The monk prostrated himself.

The Master struck him.

Commentary

The monk said that he had failed to recognize his original nature and asked Master Funshu Sekiro to show it to him. Master Sekiro refused to even listen to such an abstract question. The monk seemed to think original nature was something different from himself. Our original nature shows itself when we act fully.

The monk realized his mistake and Master Sekiro said that the monk's mistake was also his mistake. The Master took responsibility for the fact that his disciple had not yet realized the truth.

The monk bowed to the Master to indicate his gratitude and understanding of the Master's teachings, but the Master struck him. Perhaps Master Sekiro felt the monk's behavior was too easy. Perhaps he felt the monk was just imitating traditional behavior and had not really gone beyond his abstractions. The Master struck him in order to show him what real action is.

FIFTY-ONE

Quoting:

One day a monk asked Master Nansen: *When Master Gozu had not yet seen the Fourth Patriarch of China, why did hundreds of birds pick up flowers and bring them to him?*

Master Nansen said: *Because Master Gozu was moving step by step in the path of the buddhas.*

The monk said: *After he had seen the Fourth Patriarch, why didn't birds pick up flowers and bring them to him?*

The Master said: *Even though the birds did not come, Master Gozu was on the same level of truth as myself.*

Commentary

Birds, which are not bound to the earth, often symbolize the spirit or spirituality. And it is hard to imagine a more spiritual or holy scene than the one represented in this koan. Master Gozu's purity and spiritual accomplishments were so great that hundreds of birds brought flowers to honor him, even though he had "*not yet seen the Fourth Patriarch*" – that is, before he had attained the truth.

When asked why this was so, Master Nansen said that it was because Master Gozu was moving step-by-step in the path of the buddhas – that is, he was leading the life of a buddha day-by-day. When Master Gozu had seen the Fourth Patriarch – that is, after he had attained the truth – the birds no longer appeared. This suggests that the state of truth is not a spiritual state. If we become lost in spirituality it will distract us from our true aim, which is just to experience reality itself.

For many people the idea of enlightenment comes to be a similar kind of hindrance. We form a vision of what an enlightened person is supposed to be and then we measure our practice by some abstract standard. We should just get on with our practice and not worry about how much or how little enlightened we are.

FIFTY-TWO

Master Sansho asked Master Seppo: *The excellent fish with golden scales that can pass through nets – what does it eat?*

Master Seppo said: *When you get out of the net, I will tell you.*

Master Sansho said: *Although you are a reverend monk, Master of fifteen hundred disciples, you do not understand even a bit of what I am asking!*

Master Seppo said: *I am very busy with my work as the Master of this temple.*

Commentary

We might rephrase Master Sansho Enen's question as: "What is the behavior of a person who has attained the truth and slipped through the net of delusion?"

Master Seppo said that he would speak on the matter when Sansho became such a person – when he became capable of understanding the words Master Seppo might say.

Master Sansho reacted angrily and criticized Master Seppo. Master Seppo was not concerned with the criticism. For him it was a trivial matter. Master Seppo just said that he was busy and must continue with his work in the temple.

FIFTY-THREE

Master Seigen said to Master Sekito: *Everyone without exception says that there is a good situation on Mount Sokei, where Master Daikan Eno lived.*

Master Sekito said: *Here is a man who does not say that there is a good situation on Mount Sokei.*

Master Seigen said: *Then from where did you get the sutras of Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism?*

Master Sekito said: *They have vanished from this place, and not a single thing is missing from my life.*

Commentary

The fame of Master Daikan Eno had spread throughout the nation and he was praised by all the other Buddhist monks – but not by Master Sekito. Master Sekito was not really criticizing the state of Daikan Eno, he was merely saying that he too lived in reality. His state was the same as Gautama Buddha's and so he found no particular reason to praise Master Daikan. To test him, to see whether his confidence came from a real experience of Buddhism or not,

Master Seigen asked where Sekito had gotten the sutras of Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism, or in other words, where he had gotten his knowledge of Buddhism. Master Sekito replied that the sutras, or theoretical knowledge of Buddhism, had all vanished. He was living in the fullness of reality itself. That was his Buddhism.

When we begin to study Buddhism we read scriptures to know the aim of Buddhism. After we practice we realize that the aim is to realize this place here and now. Such knowledge or understanding transcends the theoretical understanding that comes from reading the scriptures. Many Buddhists, especially those of scholarly inclination, tend to become lost in the thickets of scriptural study. They think that Buddhism is whatever theory they have derived from their studies.

However, Buddhism without practice is not really Buddhism, any more than a body without a heart is a human being. We can study the body and perhaps learn some valuable things, but it is very different from encountering a living human being.

Some Buddhists, aware that Buddhism is more than just intellectual knowledge, have gone to the other extreme and said that the study of the scriptures is completely useless, and so insist that only to practice Zazen is Buddhism.

Master Dogen criticized this attitude. Human beings have great intellectual capacities. We must use them in the study of Buddhism, in the study of reality. Our study of Buddhist theories and scriptures becomes much more fruitful when it is grounded in practice. We can use our practice as a standard by which to measure our study of theories and scriptures. In this way we can keep from getting lost in our own theoretical structures.

FIFTY-FOUR

Master Hyakujo Ekai of the Ko district became a disciple of Master Baso once again.

Master Baso held up his *hossu*.

Master Hyakujo said: *Do you use that or do you find it unnecessary?*

Master Baso put his *hossu* back.

Master Hyakujo stood near Baso for a while.

Master Baso said: *After this, how will you smack your lips together to teach others?*

Master Hyakujo picked up his *hossu* and held it vertically.

Master Baso said: *Do you use that or do you find it unnecessary?*

Master Hyakujo lowered his *hossu*.

Master Baso gave a mighty shout.

Later, Master Hyakujo said to Master Obaku: *A while ago Master Baso shouted at me loudly. After that my ears were so deaf I could hear nothing for three days!*

Commentary

Master Hyakujo (called Daichi Zenji in the text) came to study under Master Baso after an absence, and Master Baso held up his *hossu* to indicate symbolically that he was preaching the Buddhist reality. Master Hyakujo asked Master Baso straight out whether he relied upon Buddhist preachings or not.

Master Baso then lowered his *hossu*, meaning that his teaching transcended the Buddhist preachings, that is he did not rely on concepts of "Buddhism" or "preachings." As Master Hyakujo continued standing there, Master Baso asked him how he would teach Buddhism to others in the future.

Master Hyakujo raised his *hossu* to indicate that he too would use the Buddhist teachings to preach reality to others. Then Master Baso asked him whether he would rely on the preachings or whether he would transcend them.

Master Hyakujo lowered his *hossu* without saying anything. Master Baso shouted at Master Hyakujo because when he lowered the *hossu* he showed that

he was not sure whether he would rely on Buddhist preachings or transcend them; he was unsure.

Some time later, Master Hyakujo related the tale to Master Obaku, saying that Master Baso had deafened him for three days with his mighty shout. This suggests that Master Baso's shout had the effect of helping Master Hyakujo to realize just what Buddhist teachings are. Master Hyakujo's way of relating the tale shows his reverence for Master Baso and his Buddhist conduct.

FIFTY-FIVE

One day Master Tozan was asked by a monk: *Among the Buddha's three kinds of bodies, which one does he use to preach Buddhism?*

The Master said: *I am always sincere here and now.*

Some time later the monk asked Master Sozan: *Master Tozan said, "I am always sincere here and now." What did he mean?*

Master Sozan said: *If you want to get my head, please cut it off and take it.*

The monk also asked Master Seppo.

Master Seppo struck the monk with a stick as he was opening his mouth, and said: *I have also been to Mount Tozan, and have since come here.*

Commentary

In Buddhist philosophy it is said that the Buddha has three kinds of bodies. The first is the Dharma body. It is the body which has continued to exist from the eternal past. It is the essential or eternal body of Buddha. The second is the body of effect. This body is the result of past conduct. It is the physical or substantial body. The third body is the body here and now. It is the body that is acting.

The monk wanted to know which body preached Buddhist sermons. The Master didn't get involved in a philosophical discussion. He stood before the monk and said, *"I am always sincere here and now."* The state of Buddha is not a theory or abstraction. It is a fact here and now. Standing before the monk was the body of Buddha preaching a Buddhist sermon, but the monk could not understand. He went to Master Sozan in hopes of getting an explanation. Master Sozan just said, *"If you want to get my head, please cut it off and take it."*

The monk seemed to think that Buddhism was just something that existed in the head. In other words, that it was just intellectual understanding. So the Master offered his own head, since that seemed to be what the monk wanted. The intellect could no more provide the answer the monk wanted than could the Master's severed head.

The monk tried a third time. This time with Master Seppo. When the monk opened his mouth Master Seppo struck him and said, *"I have also been to Mount Tozan, and have since come here."* Master Seppo knew Master Tozan's Buddhism very well, he also knew that it could not be expressed with words.

FIFTY-SIX

Master Isan Reiyu said to Master Kyozan Ejaku: *There is a secular Buddhist student who donated three bands of silk to help with the purchase of a bell, in order to ensure the happiness of the people.*

Master Kyozan said: *The secular student's silk bought the bell for the Master. How will you reward him, Master?*

The Master struck the Zazen Hall floor three times with a staff and said: *I will reward him with this.*

Master Kyozan said: *What use would a reward like that be to him?*

Master Isan struck the floor three times again, and said: *You do not like this. Then what would you do?*

Master Kyozan said: *I do not dislike it, but this is the state of a Master who has attained the truth.*

Master Isan said: *You know that Zazen is the state of a Master who has attained the truth. Why do you look for other things from me with which to reward the student?*

Master Kyozan said: *I wonder why the Master used the state of an enlightened man as the reward?*

Master Isan said: *Don't you see that even Master Bodhidharma, when he came from the west to this land, used this to reward others? You and many other people all receive his gift.*

Commentary

Master Kyozan asked Master Isan what he will offer the layman as a reward for his donation to the temple. The Master struck the floor of the Zazen Hall, indicating that he offered the practice of Zazen itself.

Master Kyozan thought this was something that could only be understood by a Master. He didn't think it would do the layman any good.

The Master said that this was the same gift that Master Bodhidharma had brought from India many years ago. Master Kyozen and many others were still receiving the benefits of that gift.

FIFTY-SEVEN

Master Sochi on Mount Dogo left Master Yakusan's temple and went to visit Master Nansen.

Master Nansen asked: *Reverend monk, what is your name?*

Master Sochi replied: *Sochi.*

(*So* means "inclusive" or "all-pervasive" when used as an adjective, and "principle" or "synthesis" when used as a noun. *Chi* means "wisdom.")

Master Nansen said: *There may be some place where the intellect cannot reach. What would you say is the "So" [principle] of that place?*

Master Sochi said: *There is a strong aversion to talking about it.*

Master Nansen said: *If you were to try to make it too clear, a horn would spring out of your head.*

Three days later, Sochi was sewing in the room behind the Zazen Hall, along with Master Ungan.

Master Nansen passed by, and seeing them, asked Master Sochi again: *A few days ago you said that you have a strong aversion to talking about the place where the intellect cannot reach. And I said that if you tried, a horn would spring out of your head. Then how should we conduct ourselves?*

At that, Master Sochi picked himself up and went into the Zazen Hall. Then Master Nansen left.

Master Sochi came back again and sat down. Then Master Ungan asked: *Why didn't you answer the Master just now?*

Master Sochi said: *Look how clever you have become!*

Master Ungan did not understand this reply, so he went and asked Master Nansen: *In the question you asked Master Sochi just now, why didn't Master Sochi reply to you, Master?*

Master Nansen said: *He doesn't follow the way of others.*

Master Ungan said: *What do you mean, not to follow the way of others?*

Master Nansen said: *Haven't you heard it said that "there is a strong aversion to talking about the place where the intellect cannot reach. If you try to explain it, a horn will spring out of your head. So we should go forward, not following the way of other people."*?

Once again, Master Ungan did not understand.

Master Sochi recognized that Master Ungan could not understand, so he said: *This man will not be satisfied in this temple.*

So they went back to Master Yakusan's temple together.

Seeing the two disciples coming back to the temple, Master Yakusan asked Ungan: *Where have you just been?*

Master Ungan said: *I have been to Master Nansen.*

Master Yakusan asked: *What did Master Nansen teach you?*

Master Ungan told the story of what had happened.

Master Yakusan said: *You have used your opportunity with Master Nansen, and now have you come back here?*

Master Ungan did not have an answer. Then Master Yakusan laughed loudly.

Then Master Ungan asked: *What does it mean to go forward, not following the way of others?*

Master Yakusan said: *I am too tired today. Come at another time.*

Master Ungan said: *I came back here especially to ask you this.*

Master Yakusan said: *Leave me for a while.*

Master Ungan left.

Master Sochi was outside the Master's room and heard that Master Ungan could not understand the situation. Then Sochi noticed that he had unconsciously been chewing the tip of a finger until he had drawn blood.

Master Sochi went to Master Ungan and asked: *What happened when you asked the Master your question?*

Master Ungan said: *The Master did not teach me anything.*

Master Sochi bowed down.

Sochi and Ungan stayed with Master Yakusan as *Jisha* (assistants).

Master Yakusan said: *There is a strong aversion to talking about the place that the intellect cannot reach. If we try, a horn will appear on our head.*

Master Sochi bowed down and left.

Then Ungan asked Yakusan: *Master, why didn't Master Sochi discuss the subject with you?*

Master Yakusan said: *I have a pain in my back today. Sochi understands why. Go and ask him.*

So Master Ungan asked Sochi: *Sochi, why did you not answer the Master just now?*

Master Sochi said: *Today I have a headache. Go and ask the Master.*

Later, when Master Ungan was about to die, he sent a man with a farewell letter to Master Sochi. Reading the letter, Master Sochi said: *There is something that Master Ungan did not understand. I regret that I did not say anything to him at that time. Even so, Master Ungan was a true disciple of Master Yakusan.*

Commentary

Both Master Dogo Sochi (also known as Dogo Enchi) and Master Ungan Donjo were disciples of Master Yakusan Igen. When Master Sochi visited Master Nansen Fugan, Master Nansen asked him about the place where the intellect cannot reach, meaning reality as it is in front of us.

Master Sochi had clearly realized that reality here and now can never be described with words, so he refused to say anything, quoting the first part of a familiar saying in Buddhism in China: *"There is a strong aversion to talking about the place where the intellect cannot reach. If you try to explain it, a horn will spring out of your head. So we should go forward, not following the way of other people."*

This saying means that if we try to express reality directly in words, we cannot do it. If we try, something superfluous (a horn on the head) will be created by our efforts. To experience reality, we should act directly from our own independent state, not always following others' opinions.

In reply, Master Nansen added the next part of the quotation as an affirmation of Sochi's behavior. Later, when Master Ungan was present, Master Nansen returned to the story, and asked Master Sochi how we should behave.

Master Sochi did not give a verbal reply; instead he just acted – he went to the Zazen Hall. Watching Master Sochi, Master Ungan could not understand why he had not replied to the question. So in turn he asked Master Nansen, Master Yakusan, and Master Sochi himself. They all suggested the reason to him either by using a simile or by avoiding to talk about it.

Still Master Ungan could not understand the principle that reality is beyond explanation, that any explanation creates something superfluous, and that simple action is the essence of Buddhist teaching.

At the end of his life, Master Ungan sent a farewell letter to Master Sochi. On reading it, Master Sochi regretted that he had not taken the chance to teach the principle to Master Ungan, but he affirmed that Master Ungan indeed deserved to be Master Yakusan's disciple.

FIFTY-EIGHT

Master Sekiso Keisho on Mount Sekiso in the Tan district was asked by a monk one day: *Master Sekiso, your fame for having the concrete state in which there is no reflection has spread more than three thousand miles.*

The Master said: *Yes, that is true.*

The monk said: *However, should we reflect on all phenomena apparent in front of us or not?*

The Master said: *My teachings do not surprise people.*

The monk said: *Not surprising people is not the same as reflecting on all phenomena. What is the state in which there is no reflection?*

The Master said: *It is when the whole Universe does not conceal anything.*

Commentary

A monk asked Master Sekiso about his state of “no reflection.” The monk wanted to know the relationship between “no reflection” and “all apparent phenomena in front of us.”

The Master replied on a more concrete basis; he said that he did not surprise people with his teachings. He meant that since reality is here in front of us, teachings about reality are no different from the facts in front of us.

However, the monk could not understand this reply. So the Master replied that the state without reflection is just the state when the whole Universe conceals nothing; that is, when everything is just as it is. His answer was a simple statement of fact, with no hidden meaning.

FIFTY-NINE

One day Master Daikan Eno on Mount Sokei was asked by a monk: *What kind of person can get the fundamental principle on Mount Obai?*

The Master said: *Someone who understands Buddhism can get it.*

The monk said: *Did you also get it, Master?*

The Master said: *I didn't get it.*

The monk said: *Master, why didn't you get it?*

The Master said: *I do not understand Buddhism.*

Commentary

A monk asked Master Daikan Eno what kind of person could get the teachings of Master Daiman Konin who was the Master of the temple on Mount Obai. The Master replied that a person who understood Buddhism could get it. When asked if he had gotten the teachings he replied that he had not, because he did not understand Buddhism.

In this koan Master Daikan Eno was not confessing his ignorance. He did not understand Buddhism because it cannot be understood intellectually.

To truly understand Buddhism means to understand or to live in reality fully and completely. The intellect can divide and analyze the real world but it can never encompass or experience it directly.

SIXTY

One day Master Gensa walked along with Master Seppo. Master Seppo pointed at the ground in front of him and said: *This is just the right place for my tomb.*

Master Gensa said: *How tall will it be?*

Master Seppo cast his eyes upward and downward to indicate the height.

Master Gensa said: *It would not be true if I said there is no happiness or benefit to human beings and gods in your words, but the Master does not have any view, even in his dreams, which was affirmed by Gautama Buddha on Vulture Peak.*

Master Seppo said: *How would you reply then?*

Master Gensa said: *Seven or eight feet.*

Commentary

Master Gensa and Master Seppo were walking together across a field. Master Seppo said that that spot would be just right for his tomb.

Master Gensa's question was very concrete. He asked how high the tomb would be. Master Seppo replied by moving his eyes up and down to indicate the height of the tomb. This gesture was too far-fetched for Master Gensa's taste. He thought Master Seppo should just say plainly "seven or eight feet" and be done with it.

In this koan we can see that both masters had a relaxed and practical attitude toward their own death. This is the attitude of a true Buddhist. They accepted the fact of their death naturally and practically, without fear.

SIXTY-ONE

Quoting:

Master Isan Reiyu was lying down one day when Master Kyozan Ejaku came into the room. The Master turned over and, facing the wall, continued lying down.

Master Kyozan said: *I am your disciple, Master. Please don't show your backside to me.*

As the Master was standing up Kyozan started to leave the room. The Master called out: *Jakusu!*

Master Kyozan turned his head.

The Master said: *I want to tell you about my dream. Please listen.*

Master Kyozan lowered his head and listened to his Master's story.

The Master said: *Please analyze my dream for me.*

Kyozan took a bowl of water and a towel to the Master. The Master washed his face, and then sat for a while.

Master Kyogen Chikan entered the room. Master Isan said: *Just now I demonstrated a supreme mystical ability with disciple Ejaku. The mystical ability was different from the small-scale abilities of the Hinayana Buddhists.*

Master Kyogen said: *I was in the next room and I could see what happened clearly.*

The Master said: *Please say something yourself.*

Then Master Kyogen made a cup of tea and brought it to the Master.

Then Master Isan praised the two disciples, saying: *You two disciples have mystical abilities and real wisdom surpassing Sariputra and Maudgalyayana.*

Commentary

In this story we can see that Buddhist teachings are realized in our daily activities. Kyozan went into the room where his Master was lying down facing the wall after taking a nap. Kyozan's humorous comment reveals something of the easy relationship that existed between the Master and his disciples.

As Kyozan was about to leave, the Master called out "*Jakusu*" which was his nickname, derived from his given name: Ejaku, combined with "*su*," which means child or disciple. The Master wanted his disciple to analyze the dream he had just had.

In answer Kyozan took a bowl of water and a towel to the Master. The Master washed his face and dried it with the towel. In the act of washing his face, the Master was able to move on. His dream, however fantastic it may have been, was over; it was time for him to resume his waking life.

Master Isan praised Kyozan's actions, saying that they demonstrated supreme mystical ability. He said this mystical ability was completely different from the small-scale mystical ability of the Hinayanist, referring to psychic powers of various types which many people regard as signs of great spiritual development. Master Isan implied that such powers are nothing compared to our ordinary everyday acts.

Some people spend years trying to develop these powers, but they distract us from our true aim, which is to live in reality; to wash our face. Master Kyogen Chikan, another student of Master Isan's, then demonstrated exactly the same "mystical ability," he brought his Master a cup of tea!

There is a story in which the Buddha was traveling one day and came to a river. Beside the river was a yogi who through many years of practice had developed the ability to walk on water. He happily demonstrated this ability to the Buddha by walking across the river and back. He wanted to know what the Buddha thought of his great accomplishment. The Buddha got into a small boat nearby. The Buddha said, "*It has taken you years to cross the river but I can do it in a few minutes.*" He then got into the small boat and was soon ferried across the river. The yogi had wasted years in developing what was really no more than a circus trick.

SIXTY-TWO

Master Shinzan Somitsu of the Tanshu District was walking with Master Tozan. Master Tozan, pointing at a small temple beside the road, said:
There is someone inside the temple who is preaching oneness of mind and matter.

Master Shinzan said: *He is "Who?"*

Master Tozan said: *When you said that, I got the state that completely transcends life and death.*

Master Shinzan said: *A person who preaches mind and matter is ineffable.*

Master Tozan said: *I have gotten the state of vitality even in death.*

Commentary

This koan relies on the dual meaning of the word "who," which can mean both "*who*" as a question, and "*ineffable*" as a description of an indescribably real person. Master Tozan suggested that even in a small temple beside the road there is someone who preaches oneness of mind and matter – that is someone who is preaching the essence of Buddhism.

Master Shinzan replied by saying that the person preaching oneness of mind and matter is beyond description. Hearing this, Master Tozan said that he had entered the state that completely transcends life and death; that is, he had fully entered the present moment, in which concepts like life and death are different from reality in front of us.

Master Tozan reiterated that the person preaching oneness of mind and matter is ineffable; that is, he is a real person who cannot be captured by a verbal description.

Master Shinzan replied that his grasp of reality was now so clear that he could remain vigorous even in death. This rather amusing assertion is his way of emphasizing his own state of clarity.

SIXTY-THREE

Master Seikatsu of Hofuku Temple in the Shoshu District became a disciple of Master Suiryu Dofu. One day the Master asked: *Patriarch Seikatsu, you are now my student. What Master did you study with before coming here? Have you attained the truth or not?*

Master Seikatsu said: *In the past, I visited Master Daisho and attained something that I could believe in.*

Then Master Suiryu went to the Lecture Hall and gathered all the disciples of the temple together and said: *Patriarch Seikatsu, come forward and face the assembly. After burning incense, please give a lecture on what you have attained. I, an old monk, will judge you.*

Master Seikatsu, picking up the incense, said: *I have picked up the incense already. However, the attainment of the truth is different from the attainment of the truth.*

Master Suiryu was enormously pleased and affirmed his disciple at once.

Commentary

The disciple picked up the incense to light it, which signals the beginning of a lecture, but he could not explain what he had attained. Reality is different from concepts and ideas about reality.

Words and concepts can be explained; reality cannot. It can only be experienced directly. The method for experiencing reality directly is Zazen.

SIXTY-FOUR

One day, when Master Nansen saw Master To Inpo approaching, he pointed to a clay vase of pure water and said: *This vase of pure water is part of the surroundings. There is water in the vase. Without disturbing the surroundings, please fetch water for me, your old Master.*

Master To Inpo took up the vase and poured the water out in front of Master Nansen.

Master Nansen did not say anything.

Commentary

Master Nansen wanted to test Master Godai (To) Inpo's ability to act in the real world, so he gave an impossible task to the disciple. In our mind it is easy to conceptualize the problem of pouring water without moving the vase, but in the real situation of Master Nansen and Master To Inpo the task was impossible.

Master To Inpo answered the challenge with his real action. The cold water pouring from the vase demonstrated the difference between the world of ideas and the real world.

SIXTY-FIVE

One day a monk said farewell to Master Kiso. The Master said: *Where are you going?*

The monk replied: *I am leaving here to study the Zazen of five tastes in many different districts.*

The Master said: *In my district – this place – I have the Zazen of one taste.*

The monk asked: *What is the Master's Zazen of one taste?*

The Master struck the disciple.

Commentary

The monk wanted to visit many different places to study the Zazen of five tastes, which refers to the five schools in China that practiced Zazen: Soto, Rinzai, Hogen, Igyo, and Unmon. The monk no doubt thought that if he traveled around and studied Zazen under all the different schools, he would get a deeper understanding.

Master Kiso replied that he had the Zazen of one taste. The Chinese character for *one* also has the meaning of *all*, so the Master meant that all situations and circumstances were included in his Zazen of one taste. To show the reality of this one-taste Zazen the Master performed a concrete action: he struck the monk. It's right here!

SIXTY-SIX

One night Master Yakusan Igen of Reishu had no light. He preached to his disciples: *I have something to say. When an excellent ox is about to bear a calf, then I will say it to you.*

At this a monk walked forward and said: *An excellent ox has borne a calf, so Master, why don't you speak?*

The Master said: *Bring me a light.*

The monk returned to the group of disciples.

Commentary

Master Dogen called the order of Master Yakusan Igen a "Dai Sorin" (great Buddhist temple), although the members of the order numbered no more than ten, and apparently there was sometimes not even enough money to buy oil for the lamps.

Master Yakusan Igen was a buddha. He lived in reality, and he wished to communicate the simple nature of reality to his disciples. He said that he would not tell them what he had to say until "*an excellent ox is about to bear a calf.*" The ox was frequently used as a symbol of Buddhist practitioners. The birth of the calf symbolizes a person who has grasped the truth. So the Master was saying that he would wait until one of the monks could grasp the truth before he spoke.

The monk who stepped forward said that the calf had already been born, or in other words that the monk had already grasped the truth, and he asked the Master to say what he wanted to say.

The Master's reply, "*fetch me a light,*" is a natural enough thing to say in a dark room, except for the fact that there were no lights to be had in the whole temple. In asking the impossible, the Master was pointing out the fact; there was no light.

The truth of the situation was simple and obvious; it didn't really need expressing. The truth is not something mystical or abstract; it is the real situation, just in this place, just at this moment.

In the darkness of the old temple the monk took his place among his fellow disciples. He had grasped the truth in his Master's wordless teaching.

SIXTY-SEVEN

One day a monk asked Master Joshu: *I am a Buddhist student who has entered the temple for the first time. I would like to ask the Master for his teachings.*

The Master said: *Have you finished your breakfast?*

The monk said: *Yes, I have.*

The Master said: *Then wash your dishes thoroughly.*

Hearing these words, the monk had an insight.

Commentary

Most people think that studying Buddhism means to read Buddhist scriptures and think about Buddhist philosophy. Yet when the monk asked for his first instruction from Master Joshu, he was asked if he had eaten breakfast and then told to wash his dishes. I wonder how many people in the same situation would have thought, "I didn't come here for this. When is he going to start teaching me."

Reality exists only here and now in this present situation. It is not something that will appear sometime in the future after we have made sufficient heroic efforts. For this reason Buddhism is the religion, not of some far off spiritual realm, but of daily life and common action.

SIXTY-EIGHT

One day Master Isan asked Master Kyozan: *Where have you come from?*

Master Kyozan said: *I have been out in the fields.*

Master Isan said: *How many people were out there with you in the fields?*

Master Kyozan held his mattock and stood with both hands in *shashu*.

Master Isan said: *Today in the Southern Mountain there is a great man who cuts tall reeds.*

Master Kyozan left carrying his mattock.

Commentary

When he returned from the fields, Master Kyozan was asked how many people had been out there with him. Kyozan just stood in the posture of *shashu* with the mattock in his hands.

This posture of concentrated attention and respect showed that Kyozan valued what he had actually done above talk about how many people were with him. Master Kyozan showed his sincere nature directly to Master Isan, who praised his attitude as being that of a great man.

SIXTY-NINE

Patriarch Chin of Ryuko Temple in the Boku district asked a *Shusai*: *What kind of sutras have you studied?*

The *Shusai* said: *I have studied the sutras of divination (I-Ching).*

The Master said: *It is said in the I-Ching that even though various people use it in their day-to-day lives, they do not know that they are using it. What is this thing that they do not know?*

The *Shusai* said: *They do not know the truth.*

The Master said: *What is the truth?*

The *Shusai* did not say anything.

The Master said: *In the end you do not know.*

Commentary

Even though all kinds of people use the truth in their day-to-day lives they do not know they are using it. Everyone lives in the truth at every moment. There is no escape from it. Even our delusions are contained in the truth. Why do we not recognize it? We identify ourselves with the ego, with the intellect, and this limits our vision.

We may close our eyes on a sunny day and say that the sun has vanished, but this does not really mean that the sun is no longer there. To see the truth we must live the truth, and this means first of all that we must practice Zazen.

In ancient China, the title *Shusai* was given to someone who had passed a certain level in the national examination system for government officers. It carried a connotation of being very clever. When Patriarch Chin (Master Bokushu Domyo) asked the *Shusai* about the truth, the *Shusai* did not say anything. Did he remain silent because he was dumbfounded or because such a question cannot be answered?

Words belong to descriptions of reality. However, this reality can never be captured with words or known by the intellect. Therefore the Patriarch said "*In the end you do not know.*" The *Shusai* did not "know" the truth because the truth is not something that can be known, at least not in the usual meaning of the word.

SEVENTY

Master Unmon Bun-en in the Sho district asked Master Sozan Honjaku:
How should a Buddhist monk conduct himself?

Master Sozan said: *He should eat the vegetables that come from the temple garden.*

Master Unmon said: *What happens as a result of living like that?*

Master Sozan said: *Have you ever raised an animal?*

Master Unmon said: *Yes, I have.*

Master Sozan said: *What kind of animal did you raise?*

Master Unmon said: *It has been wearing clothes and eating meals, which is not difficult.*

Master Sozan said: *You should have said that it was an animal covered with hair and with horns on its head.*

Master Unmon prostrated himself in front of his Master.

Commentary

Master Sozan said that the conduct of a monk is to eat the vegetables that are grown in the temple garden. This suggests the natural and simple life of a monk. There is nothing supernatural about being a monk.

Usually people imagine that a monk must lead a very spiritual and holy life. Master Sozan said that a monk should just eat the vegetables from the temple garden. In this the Master countered the tendency to emphasize the spiritual side of a monk's life by focusing on the concrete aspect. A monk eats the vegetables grown in the temple gardens – what could be simpler or more natural?

When Master Unmon (Master Kyoshin in the text) asked what it was like to live such a simple life, Master Sozan turned the question back on him by asking him about his own life. Master Sozan asked whether he had raised an animal, but the Master's question was really asking whether Master Unmon had raised or trained himself as a monk.

Master Unmon said that he had raised his “animal,” or trained himself as a monk, by wearing clothes and eating meals, again emphasizing the ordinarieness of the monk's life, and adding that this had not been difficult to do.

In his reply, Master Sozan suggested that Master Unmon's description was too perfect. Life is more untidy than that. It would have been more appropriate for him to have compared himself with an animal covered with hair and with horns on his head. In prostrating to Master Sozan, Unmon showed that he accepted his master's remark.

SEVENTY-ONE

Quoting:

Master Hoki on Mount Seihei in the Gaku district asked Master Suibi:
What was Bodhidharma's intention in coming to China from India?

Master Suibi replied: *I will tell you the answer when no-one else is around.*

After a short time, Master Hoki said: *There is no-one around. Would you please tell me, Master?*

Master Suibi stepped down to the floor of the Zazen Hall and guided Master Hoki into a bamboo garden.

Again Master Hoki said: *There is no-one here. Please Master, tell me.*

Master Suibi, pointing at the bamboo said: *This stalk is this long; that stalk is that short.*

Commentary

Master Hoki (usually known as Seihei Reijun), wanted to know the essence of Buddhism. What was it that caused Master Bodhidharma to make the long and difficult journey from India to China? Master Suibi Mugaku told him to wait until there was no one else nearby. He then stepped down onto the floor of the Zendo and motioned for Master Hoki to follow him.

What was going through Master Hoki's mind at the time? Here he was in the silence of the Zendo with the great Master who had promised to reveal the great secret of Buddhism. What did he expect as they stepped through the door of the temple into the garden? There the Master revealed the fundamental truth of Buddhism. He pointed to the garden and said: Some of the bamboo stalks are long and some of them are short.

The essence, the great "secret" of Buddhism is just reality itself. All things, just as they are, preach the ultimate truth of Buddhism.

SEVENTY-TWO

Master Tozan Ryokai said: *You should know about the matter of ascending buddhas.*

The monk said: *What is the matter of ascending buddhas?*

Master Tozan Ryokai said: *It is not buddhas.*

Master Unmon said: *It cannot be named. It cannot be expressed. Therefore the Master said "not."*

Master Hogen said: *We call them buddhas just as a way of teaching.*

Commentary

Master Tozan wanted to teach his disciples about the matter of ascending buddhas. This expression refers to the fact that after attaining the truth, buddhas continue with their simple, ordinary lives. Being a buddha – buddhahood – cannot be separated from real life. Buddhahood is not an abstraction. It is a fact expressed in our day-to-day lives.

When the monk asked Master Tozan to explain the idea of ascending buddhas, he said it is *not buddhas*. What did he mean? Master Unmon offered this explanation: *"It cannot be named. It cannot be expressed. Therefore the Master said not."* Buddhahood and day-to-day life are concepts. Reality itself is inexpressible.

Master Hogen said that we call people buddhas just for the purpose of teaching. The concept "buddhas" is not the reality of buddhas. Yet concepts do have their uses. It is important to explain what can be explained and to point beyond, to that which transcends explanation and concepts.

The ultimate aim of Buddhist practice is the state that transcends the concept called "buddhahood." A true buddha may look more like an ordinary person than our idea of what a buddha should be. These buddhas who do not look like buddhas are called ascending buddhas.

SEVENTY-THREE

Master Himagan Jogu on Mount Godai had a forked stick. When he saw a Buddhist monk coming, he would hold it up and say: *What kind of demons made you into a Buddhist monk? What kind of devils made you take up this pilgrimage? If you say something I will strike you with my stick; if you do not say anything I will strike you with my stick. Speak now! Speak now!*

Commentary

Master Himagan demanded of the monks who approached him, “*What kind of demons made you into a Buddhist monk?*” This was a somewhat ironic expression, but it is a question we might well ask ourselves. What kind of devils caused us to begin following the Buddhist path?

Usually we don’t want to be pursued by demons. We think if we can just escape them or ignore them, life will be fine – but we never quite seem to get rid of them. These problems, or demons, should be respected for their part in making us take up Buddhist practice in the first place. Working with our demons gives strength to our practice.

Master Himagan put the monks in a logically impossible situation. He said that he would strike them with his stick if they spoke and also if they didn’t speak. Then he demanded that they speak at once.

The Buddhist truth cannot be expressed with words, but at the same time, it is important for Buddhist monks to try to express something. It is important for them to point the way toward the inexpressible.

SEVENTY-FOUR

In the Jo district one day, an old woman sent a man to Master Joshu with a donation, and a request that he recite all of the Buddhist Sutras.

Master Joshu stepped down to the floor of the Zazen Hall and walked around his seat once. Then he said: *I have recited the whole of the Buddhist Sutras.*

The man went back to the old lady and reported the Master's conduct to her. She said, *I asked Master Joshu to formally recite the whole of the Buddhist Sutras once. I feel as if he only half-recited them.*

Commentary

Master Joshu expressed the fact that ultimately Buddhism is action; it is reality itself. The written sutras can point toward this reality but they are not the whole of reality itself. When asked by the donor to recite all of the sutras, Master Joshu presented her with this action, this reality. He offered her the ultimate truth of Buddhism – reality itself.

The messenger returned to the old woman and reported what had happened. Although the old woman may have been an experienced Buddhist student, she could not understand how walking once around the chair could represent the whole of the sutras. She felt that the master had not completed her request.

In Chinese and Japanese, nouns have no singular or plural form, and thus the phrase “the whole of the Buddhist sutras” and the phrase “the whole Buddhist sutra” are the same. Master Joshu recited “the whole Buddhist sutra once,” where as the old woman had expected him to recite “the whole of the Buddhist sutras once.” For this reason, she felt that the job had only been half-completed. Master Joshu had shown her the whole of the Buddhist sutras, and the whole Buddhist sutra in one act.

In *Shobogenzo Kankin (Reading Sutras)*, Master Dogen says that, for Master Joshu, walking round his chair really did represent the whole of the Buddhist sutras, whereas the old woman was merely lost in her concern over whether Master Joshu had done what she requested.

SEVENTY-FIVE

Master Ganto Seigen from Gakushu was once asked by a monk: *When the three worlds arise ceaselessly, how should we act?*

Master Ganto Seigen said: *Just sit in Zazen.*

The monk said: *I cannot understand what you mean, Master.*

Master Ganto Seigen said: *Bring Mount Rozan here. Then I will tell you.*

Commentary

The master referred to in this story as Master Ganto Seigen is Master Ganto Zenkatsu, who appears in other stories.

In some Buddhist theories, the three worlds are the world of volition or mind, the world of matter, and the world of non-matter or action.

Ordinary people divide the one reality into these three different worlds, and then become lost in them. Cut off from the fullness of reality, such lives are often filled with misery.

The monk wanted to know how we act when we are being tossed in the churning waters of these three worlds. The Master said, *"Just sit."*

The intellect cannot save us from the suffering that comes from living in the world of the mind. Nor can the senses save us from the torment that comes from living in the materialistic world of the senses. Action cannot save us if our actions are based on an unbalanced state of body and mind.

By just sitting (*shikantaza*) we are able to enter reality directly. We can make the three worlds one again. This doesn't mean that our problems vanish immediately. Entering reality through the gate of Zazen, on a day-to-day basis, has the effect of loosening our attachment to the extreme conditions (or world) that we are caught up in. Our lives become more balanced. We are able to let go of our problems, and deal with – act in – reality in a more balanced way.

To the monk, the injunction to just sit seemed too simple. He could not see how just sitting could still the ceaseless churning of the three worlds.

The Master said he would explain after the monk performed the impossible task of bringing Mount Rozan to him. One can think and talk and write about Zazen from now until the end of time, and it will never be the same as actually sitting down to practice.

There is only one way to learn the reality of Zazen, and that is to actually practice it for ourselves.

SEVENTY-SIX

One day Master Isan Reiyu was asked by a monk: *What is the truth?*

Master Isan said: *Not to have an intentional idea is the truth.*

The monk said: *I cannot understand your words.*

Master Isan said: *It is good to know that there is something that cannot be understood.*

The monk said: *In what state can we know that there is something that cannot be understood?*

Master Isan said: *When you are just you – not different from yourself.*

Commentary

Master Isan said that we should know that there is something that cannot be understood. We are making progress when we finally grasp that some things cannot be grasped intellectually.

Many people believe that it is possible to understand all things and phenomena. This idea is wrong. We can analyze reality on the basis of the categories and concepts which we may set up, but we cannot capture the whole of reality in this way. There is always something that slips through.

Reality cannot be understood by the concept-hungry intellect, but it can be experienced by the whole, balanced body/mind because reality is not different from ourselves. We ourselves are reality. And when we are just ourselves, then we can understand that reality cannot be understood.

SEVENTY-SEVEN

The great Master Shoku on Mount Daiji in the Ko district preached to an assembly: *It is better to practice one foot than to explain ten feet. It is better for us to practice one inch than to explain ten inches.*

Master Tozan said: *We explain what we cannot practice and we practice what we cannot explain.*

Commentary

Master Shoku (Daiji Kanchu) said that the value of practice is much greater than the value of explanation. Master Tozan said that what can be practiced is different from what can be explained, and what can be explained is different from what can be practiced.

In studying Buddhism, it is very important to distinguish practice and explanation. They each have their place in the study of Buddhism. However, practice is the backbone of our study. Our explanations of Buddhism are not believable if they are not backed up with practice.

SEVENTY-EIGHT

One day Master Tozan called his *Shuso*, Tai, and offered him fruit to eat. Then the Master said: *There is one thing that supports heaven and earth. It is as black as lacquer, and it is always moving and functioning. At the same time, it pervades beyond its movement and function. Say where the mistake is.*

The *Shuso* said: *The mistake is in the movement and function.*

Master Tozan scolded the disciple and took the fruit away from him.

Commentary

Master Tozan made a number of statements with which he wanted to indicate something of the nature of reality. He said that it supports both heaven and earth, because “heaven” and “earth” are concepts that attempt to categorize aspects of reality. But reality is not used up by these concepts. Reality transcends both heaven and earth. It is black as lacquer because it is indefinite and does not show a clear outline. We can see reality in the constant moving and functioning of all things. Again, reality transcends the idea of movement, function, and things.

The Master asked the monk to say where there was a mistake, and the monk’s answer made it clear that he had no understanding of the Master’s words.

On an intellectual level, it might be possible to find fault with the Master’s words; to say what is right and what is wrong. The reality to which his words point does not contain anything that can be called a mistake; it is beyond right and wrong.

Perhaps if the monk had answered with his own vivid expression, the discussion might have continued and the disciple might have been allowed to taste some of the fruit the Master had offered him.

SEVENTY-NINE

Master Yakusan Igen had not held a formal lecture in the Lecture Hall for a long time.

The Head Monk said to the Master: *The monks in the temple are longing to hear your teachings. Please Master, give a lecture for them.*

The Master told the Head Monk to strike the bell. The assembly gathered at once.

The Master went to the Lecture Hall. Then after a little while, he stepped down from the lecture seat and went back to his personal room.

The Head Monk followed the Master and said: *Master, you allowed me to announce a lecture for the monks. Why didn't you say anything?*

The Master said: *There are teachers of sutras for Buddhist Sutras. There are teachers of commentaries for Buddhist Commentaries. How can you have any doubt about me?*

Commentary

The Head Monk was becoming concerned over the fact that Master Yakusan had not given a lecture in a long time. Perhaps the Head Monk felt that the monks were not receiving sufficient instruction. He finally prevailed on the Master to teach the monks in the Lecture Hall.

But what did the lecture consist of? The Master just sat silently in front of the monks for a while and then stepped down. The Head Monk asked why the Master did not give a lecture as he had promised.

The Master said that there were teachers of sutras and commentaries, but he was not that kind of teacher. Then what kind of teacher was he?

Master Yakusan taught action itself, Buddhist conduct itself. Ultimately, real action is ineffable, so we cannot say precisely what kind of teacher he was, but what he taught – real conduct – is the fundamental basis of Buddhism on which the sutras and commentaries are built.

EIGHTY

One day a monk said farewell to Master Joshu.

The Master asked: *Where do you plan to go?*

The monk said: *I am going to study Buddhism in many different districts.*

The Master took up his *hossu* and said: *You should not stay where "buddha" is. You should run away from where buddha is not. When you meet someone, even if at a place three thousand miles from here, you should not make a mistake in your preaching.*

The monk said: *If your teachings are like that, I will not leave.*

The Master said: *Pick up the willow blossom. Pick up the willow blossom.*

Commentary

A monk studying with Master Joshu decided to travel around the countryside, visiting various places where he might be able to further his study of Buddhism.

Master Joshu gave the monk some advice for his trip. He said that the monk should avoid places where "Buddhism" exists. This means to stay away from an intellectual or spiritual understanding of Buddhism. He also told the monk to stay away from places where Buddhism does not exist. In other words, the monk should avoid falling into a materialistic perspective which cannot encompass true Buddhism. Thus the Master said that Buddhism is more than just theories but also more than just objective facts.

Hearing this, the monk decided to stay with Master Joshu. After the monk made his decision, Master Joshu told him to pick up the willow blossom; that is, he should continue with his ordinary life in the temple. This ordinary action in our real life is the fourth or ultimate phase of Buddhism.

EIGHTY-ONE

Quoting:

Master Unmon preached to an assembly: *Everyone exists with their own light. However, when they try to look at it, it is invisible, and there is only deep, deep darkness. How does this light exist?*

The assembly did not answer.

So the Master himself said in place of the assembly: *The Zazen Hall, the Buddha Hall, the kitchen, and the temple gate.*

He added: *It is better if even good things do not exist.*

Commentary

Light illuminates all things, but we cannot see light itself. As with light, everyone and everything exist in reality. But reality cannot be the object of our thoughts, for reality encompasses the mind that thinks those thoughts.

When we look for a direct expression of reality we see the Zazen Hall, the Buddha Hall, the kitchen, and the temple gate. These things are not just objects. They are indeed matter, but they are also function, value, and mind. Something real is not divided into mind and matter.

In the last sentence, Master Unmon said, *"It is better if even good things do not exist."* If reality is beyond the distinction between mind and matter, it must also be beyond such divisions as good and bad, high and low, etc.

So understanding or realizing the "good" is not the full realization of reality. Reality is beyond such distinctions. It is just what is here in front of us: the Zazen Hall, the Buddha Hall, the kitchen, and the temple gate.

EIGHTY-TWO

Master Tozan preached to the assembly at the end of summer: *Autumn is beginning and summer has ended. Now you should go to the place where there is not a bit of grass within ten thousand miles.*

The assembly said nothing.

A monk told this story to Master Sekiso. Master Sekiso said: *You should have replied that even if we go out of the gate, there is only grass.*

Commentary

In Buddhist literature, grass is often used as a symbol of the various obstacles that confront us in our practice and in our life in general.

This story takes place at the end of summer, probably at the end of the ninety-day period of intensive practice. The members of the assembly had just finished this time of intensive Zazen practice and were about to resume their usual lives. Master Tozan told them to go to the place where there is no grass. He advised them to retain the balanced state where there are no obstacles, nothing to bother them in their daily lives. The monks did not reply.

Later, one of the monks told Master Sekiso what had happened. Master Sekiso said that someone should have replied to Master Tozan, saying that inside the gate and outside the gate there is only grass. We cannot escape reality, we cannot escape the problems of daily life.

Some people see their Buddhist practice as a way of reaching some sort of spiritual paradise where they will be able to escape the problems of day-to-day living. The place where there is no grass for ten thousand miles and the place where there is only grass are the same. Reality exists in our daily life and practice. There is no reality outside of daily life and practice.

EIGHTY-THREE

Master Ungan Donjo in the Tan district was sweeping the ground one day.

Master Dogo Enchi said: *You are very diligent in your work.*

Master Ungan said: *There is someone who is not diligent.*

Master Dogo said: *If that is true, you must have a second moon.*

Then Master Ungan stood up his broom and said: *How many moons are here?*

Master Dogo left without saying anything.

Commentary

Master Dogo praised Master Ungan for his diligence, but Master Ungan felt that these words were too one-sided, so he indicated the opposite viewpoint: There is a man who is not diligent. Master Ungan was saying that he was just sweeping the floor; his action was neither diligent nor lazy. It was just real action in the real world.

Master Dogo misinterpreted Master Ungan's words to mean that there was some division or self-consciousness in him; that there was one Ungan who felt diligent, and another Ungan who didn't. He expressed this by saying that Master Ungan must have a second moon. When our sight is clear, we see one moon in the sky. When our sight is clouded we see two moons, even though there is only one real moon.

The expression "two moons" was often used to indicate a state of divided consciousness. The state when we are thinking about something while we are doing something else is one example of this. But the Buddhist state is one of wholeness in action – one in which there is no second moon.

Master Ungan held his broom by his side, and standing there very straight and concentrated he asked, "*How many moons are here?*" He challenged Master Dogo to find any division or fault in his behavior. Master Dogo left without saying anything further.

EIGHTY-FOUR

One day Master Ungan said to an assembly: *There is a child of a human family. If you ask him a question, there is nothing that he cannot explain.*

Master Tozan asked: *Are there any books in his house?*

Master Ungan said: *There are none, not even one character.*

Master Tozan said: *How was it possible for him to obtain so much knowledge?*

Master Ungan said: *He didn't sleep night and day.*

Master Tozan said: *If we ask him about the truth, can he answer?*

Master Ungan said: *Even if he knew how to express the truth, he would never express it.*

Commentary

Our natural state is sometimes compared to that of a child. Both can be characterized by spontaneity, intuitiveness, and simplicity of behavior. There is nothing that cannot be expressed in this childlike state. This state has nothing to do with book learning.

Master Ungan said that there was not even one character of written text in the child's house. How then did he acquire his wisdom? Master Ungan said that the child did not sleep night or day. This is an expression of diligence in the practice of Zazen.

Even though the child can express everything, he does not say anything about the truth. The reason being that anything that could be said would fall short of the truth and would be misleading. The child expresses the truth with its very being, because it is never separate from the truth.

EIGHTY-FIVE

One day Acarya Kyoshu Zenmyo asked Master Sekiso: *What happens when "a single strand of hair has gouged out innumerable holes?"*

Master Sekiso said: *That would take tens of thousands of years.*

Zenmyo said: *What happens after tens of thousands of years?*

Master Sekiso said: *I will leave your upgrading in the Toka (government examination for monks) to take its own course, and I will leave your promotion to take its own course.*

On another occasion, Zenmyo asked the same question to Master Ko-in of Kin mountain.

Master Ko-in said: *I will leave your shiny shoes as they are; and I will leave the result of your efforts as it is.*

Commentary

Acarya Zenmyo's question contains the simile of a thin fragile hair gouging out myriad holes. This suggests that repeated effort to study and practice Buddhism over a long time can achieve something. If we make our effort at this moment, again and again, we can in fact accomplish things that seem impossible.

Master Sekiso answered that we may have to wait for ever to see the result. Zenmyo wanted to know what happens when we get the result. Master Sekiso's answer suggests that our repeated efforts at each present moment may bring a result (passing the Toka examination), but in each moment, we do not look for result, we leave things as they are. There may be a result or there may be no result. Our effort at this moment is the important thing. We can leave the result of our effort as it is.

When Acarya Zenmyo asked Master Kinzan Ko-in for clarification, Master Ko-in gave an answer that was essentially the same as Master Sekiso's.

EIGHTY-SIX

Master Jun, a Buddhist monk in a cotton robe, was in the order of Master Yakusan Igen and became *Densu* (head of the Buddha Hall). While they were washing the statue of the Buddha, Master Yakusan said: *You are washing this buddha. Can you wash that buddha?*

Master Jun said: *Please bring that buddha here.*

Master Yakusan said nothing.

Commentary

Master Yakusan said that the monk was washing the concrete statue of the Buddha, but asked if the monk could wash his abstract or spiritual image of the Buddha. Reality shows two sides; the concrete and the abstract.

Master Jun challenged the Master to bring the abstract Buddha statue to the Buddha Hall, and then he would wash it. A real buddha is both concrete and abstract; both material and spiritual. In the end, they were washing a statue.

EIGHTY-SEVEN

Whenever Master Ho-un of Roso Mountain in the Chi district saw a monk coming toward him, he would turn to face the wall and begin sitting in Zazen at once.

One day Master Nansen went to see him. Master Ho-un turned to face the wall and began sitting in Zazen. Master Nansen finally laid a hand on his shoulder.

Master Ho-un said: *Who are you?*

Master Nansen said: *Fugan.*

Master Ho-un said: *What are you doing?*

Master Nansen said: *This is just normal conduct.*

Commentary

Whenever someone approached Master Roso Ho-un, he would turn to face the wall and begin practicing Zazen. Some people might admire Ho-un for his stern attitude, but in fact his manner was rather unfriendly. His behavior expressed an arrogant attitude toward the other monks. Transcending the ordinary is not such strong practice. The strongest attitude is close to the ordinary.

Master Nansen went to where Ho-un was sitting, and when Ho-un did not take any notice of him, laid his hand on his shoulder. Master Ho-un, feigning surprise, asked, *"Who are you?"*

If you know that someone is coming, it is natural to greet them, rather than to turn around and practice Zazen. Master Nansen laid his hand on Ho-un's shoulder as if to say, *"Hello it's me! Don't be so stiff!"* This is natural behavior.

EIGHTY-EIGHT

When Layman Ho-on was sitting in Zazen he asked Master Reisho: *An ancient Master said "Clear, clear are the hundreds of grasses. Clear, clear is the consciousness of the ancient masters." What do you think of these words?*

Master Reisho said: *With your experience in Zazen and dignity, how could you bring up such a story?*

The layman said: *But what do you think?*

Master Reisho repeated the same words: *"Clear, clear are the hundreds of grasses. Clear, clear is the consciousness of the ancient masters."*

The layman laughed loudly.

Commentary

Master Reisho was Layman Ho-on's daughter. Layman Ho-on quoted a saying of the ancient masters that describes the state in which the Universe conceals nothing – in which everything is clear and just as it is. He was expressing his state in Zazen.

Master Reisho thought that her father was asking her a very basic question – one that she thought too basic for such a great practitioner as he was. However, her father was in fact asking her if her state was the state expressed by these words.

When asked directly by her father how she would express her state, Master Reisho repeated the words of the ancient master, because they express the balanced state in Zazen very well. Father and daughter; their words were the same, their states were the same. Layman Ho-on's laughter expressed this fact.

EIGHTY-NINE

One day Master Sekiso asked his *Jisha* (assistant): *Master Dogo once said to a monk, "You should not throw away that place and become attached to this place." What is your opinion?*

The *Jisha* said: *I rely completely on your understanding, Master.*

The Master said: *What is my understanding?*

The *Jisha* walked from the west to the east and stood there.

The Master said: *You just threw away that place and became attached to this place.*

Commentary

Master Sekiso said, *"You should not throw away that place and become attached to this place."* Buddhism teaches the middle way. The middle way is the way between attachment and detachment. Usually we leave one place with the intention of getting to another place. We throw away the place we are at to get to the place we want to be. Buddhism teaches us that reality is where we are now.

The monk said that his understanding was the same as his master's. However, the Master asked him to demonstrate his understanding. When the Master saw his assistant simply walking from that place to this place, he realized that the assistant had simply walked from here to there, not showing oneness of being in his action.

NINETY

Master Senu Tokujo of Katei County in the Shu district was living in the order of Master Yakusan, together with Masters Dogo and Ungan.

Master Senu left Masters Dogo and Ungan and went to live near the Katei River, where he fished from a small boat.

Sometime earlier Master Senu had asked Master Dogo: *Elder brother, if in the future you encounter a head monk who is very intelligent, please send him to visit me.*

Master Kassan Zen-e was living at Chikurin Temple at the entrance of the city of Junshu. After traveling through many districts like a cloud, Master Dogo chanced to hear Master Kassan giving a formal lecture. A monk in the audience asked: *What is the Dharma-body?*

Master Kassan said: *The Dharma-body has no form.*

The monk said: *What is the Dharma-eye?*

Master Kassan said: *The Dharma-eye has no crack.*

Despite himself, Master Dogo could not help laughing.

Master Kassan glanced at him. Then getting down from the preaching seat, he requested Master Dogo to sit on the preaching seat, and prostrating himself fully before Master Dogo he asked: *The replies that I gave to the monk just now must surely have contained something that was not true, and so you, Reverend Monk, were unable to stop laughing. Would you be kind enough to tell me what the problem is?*

Master Dogo said: *Even though the Master has become the head of a large temple, just like other masters, he looks as if he did not have a teacher.*

Master Kassan said: *Please tell me what is wrong with me. I hope you can explain to me.*

Master Dogo said: *I will not explain it at all. I have a friend. He is living on a boat on the Katei River and teaches others. Please, Master, go there and see him. Then you will surely get something.*

Master Kassan said: *What is your friend like?*

Master Dogo said: *He does not have a roof above his head, nor any ground under him. Master, if you go there you should disguise the fact that you are a monk.*

Then Master Kassan, following Master Dogo's advice, dispersed the monks of his temple and changing into secular clothes, went immediately to the Katei River.

Master Senu glanced at Master Kassan and asked: *Reverend Buddhist Monk, what temple have you been living in?*

Master Kassan said: *I do not live in a temple; if I did I wouldn't look like this.*

Master Senu said: *Although you say "I wouldn't look like this," you do not look like something else.*

Master Kassan said: *It is not "this" in front of us.*

Master Senu said: *Where were you studying before coming here?*

Master Kassan said: *It is not a place that can be reached by the ears and eyes.*

Master Senu said: *"A word that can be understood is a pole to which a donkey is tied for eons."*

Then he added: *I have been dangling you a line which is thousands of feet long, but your mind is in a deep pool. Why don't you say anything, waiting only three inches from the hook?*

Master Kassan started to open his mouth. Master Senu struck him with the rod, which knocked him into the water. Master Kassan just managed to pull himself out of the water and back into the boat.

Master Senu said: *Say something! Say something!*

Master Kassan started to open his mouth, and Master Senu struck him again. At that moment, Master Kassan attained the truth suddenly. Then he nodded three times.

Master Senu said: *You can play with the line near the top of the rod, but it is naturally better not to stir up the clear water.*

Master Kassan asked at last: *You throw away both line and hook. What are you aiming for?*

Master Senu said: *Just to cast a line out onto the blue water so that it floats peacefully. This is to realize Mu (emptiness).*

Master Kassan said: *Words are tinted black and there is no way to reach them. The tip of the tongue speaks, but it does not say anything.*

Master Senu said: *When you fish the whole length of the river, you can meet the fish with the golden scales for the first time.*

Master Kassan covered his ears.

Master Senu said: *That's it! That's it!*

At last, trusting in Master Kassan, Master Senu said: *From now on, you should erase your footprints in the place where you conceal yourself; but do not conceal yourself where your footprints are erased. I stayed on Mount Yakusan for thirty years and got only this. Now you have it already. From now on you should not live in a city or a village. Just go to a place near an iron cauldron deep in the mountains and train one or even half a person. As the successor to my teachings, never let them cease.*

Understanding the Master's intention, Master Kassan prostrated himself in front of the Master and left. Reaching the bank of the river, he walked away, turning back many times.

At last Master Senu called out to Master Kassan: *Acarya! Acarya!*

Master Kassan turned to face him. Then Master Senu held the oar of the boat vertically and said: *You! There may be other words that you will say.* After saying this, he tipped the boat over and vanished into the misty waves.

Commentary

Dogo's laughter made Master Kassan realize that his understanding was inadequate. He had been repeating many traditional phrases that were used to explain reality, with realizing that reality is not contained in those words. He had not found the voice with which to express his own state. In spite of this, the sincerity of his will to the truth can be seen in the way he asked Master Dogo to explain to him, without regard for his own reputation as the master of a great temple.

Master Dogo sent him to his fellow disciple, Master Senu. Master Senu was leading a simple life as a fisherman on the river, and was waiting for someone who could understand and experience the truth fully. He was not one to be impressed by the accouterments of rank and privilege in the Buddhist hierarchy. Therefore Master Kassan could not rely on his fine robe to carry him through the encounter with Master Senu. He had only himself to rely on.

Master Senu asked Master Kassan what he meant by saying that if he was a monk (which he was in fact), he would not look like he did at that moment. Master Kassan's reply was that he was not concerned with his social appearance, but that he was there to find the truth.

When asked where he had been studying, Master Kassan said it was a place where the senses could not reach. These sentences demonstrate a subjective or idealistic viewpoint.

Master Senu said that a word that can be understood is a pole to which a donkey is tied for endless eons. Intellectual ideas, even correct ones, can be a trap. We can never escape this trap if we remain in the realm of the intellect. Master Senu said he was dangling a line; trying to encourage Master Kassan to express himself directly, not by using traditional phrases, or just imitating the words of the ancients. He pushed Master Kassan to act directly, to untie himself from the pole.

When Master Kassan started to speak, Senu knocked him out of the boat with his fishing rod. Kassan struggled back into the boat, and while he was still trying to catch his breath, Master Senu demanded that he say something immediately. As he started to open his mouth Master Senu struck him again. With this rather severe encouragement Master Kassan suddenly realized that reality is not the same as our idea of it. He was able to enter reality directly.

At this, Master Senu said that we can use words to a limited extent to explain reality (play with the line near to top of the rod) but it is better not to disturb the clear water by trying to catch reality within those words. Master Kassan asked why it was that Senu kept himself free from being caught by the words and concepts used to explain Buddhism (throw away both line and hook).

Master Senu said that his aim was simply to cast his line out on the water and sit peacefully, and that this state was called *Mu*, the state that is empty of all categories and concepts. His aim was just to be in reality. Master Kassan understood. He felt that Master Senu's words had a depth to them, and yet they were not dogmatic. He realized that words have their limitations, and that the present moment is always beyond our ability to grasp with the mind.

Master Senu said that fishing the whole length of the river in this way, he had been able to meet the fish with golden scales (return to his own natural state). Even though these words were true, Master Kassan covered his ears to keep from hearing them. Master Senu strongly approved of this behavior. Words, even true words, can never encompass reality.

Master Senu then advised Master Kassan to cover his tracks, go deep into the mountains, and be content if he could train one person, or even if he could half-train a person. He said that during his time studying with his master on

Mount Yakusan, the peaceful and independent state that he lived in was the only thing he had got.

As Master Kassan was leaving, Master Senu called out to him and said that in the future Kassan would have his own words and methods with which to teach the truth. Then Master Senu tipped over the boat and disappeared into the water. He had transmitted the Dharma to a true disciple.

NINETY-ONE

Quoting:

Master Obaku said to a monk: *Old veteran monks from many districts are all on the head of my staff.*

The monk prostrated himself.

On a later occasion, the monk went to the temple where Master Daiju was staying and told him what Master Obaku had said.

Master Daiju said: *Master Obaku said that? Has he met these monks from many districts?*

The monk returned to Master Obaku and told him what Master Daiju had said.

Master Obaku said: *Those words which I said have already spread throughout the world.*

Master Kaku on Mount Roya said: *It seems as if Master Daiju had excellent eyes, but actually he was blind. Master Obaku's staff cannot be broken even if all the people in the world were to chew on it.*

Commentary

Master Obaku's words can be interpreted in two different ways. First, they can be seen as an indication of his self-confidence. His reputation had spread through the country and he had taught many excellent disciples, including Master Rinzai.

Another interpretation is based on a fundamental principle of Buddhist theory. Master Obaku's staff was a concrete, real thing. Reality is inclusive; it includes Master Obaku's staff, the veteran monks of many districts, and all Buddhist theories.

Master Daiju criticized Master Obaku's words. He felt they were too proud and not realistic. When informed of Master Daiju's criticism, Master Obaku just reaffirmed his confidence in what he had said.

Later Master Roya Ekaku said that Master Daiju seemed to be blind to the true value of Master Obaku's words. He castigated Master Daiju for criticizing Master Obaku without understanding his state. Master Ekaku felt that Master Obaku's state was firmly based in reality. It could not be shaken by any amount of criticism.

NINETY-TWO

Master Enen of Sansho temple in the Chin district said: *When I have the chance to meet people, I meet them, but even if I meet them I do not always teach them.*

Master Koke said: *When I have the chance to meet people, I do not always meet them, but when I meet them I always teach them.*

Commentary

In their statements we can see something of the different personalities of the two masters. Master Sansho Enen met people freely but he did not always teach them. Teaching in this case means to teach the theories and ideas of Buddhism in words.

Master Koke Sansho was somewhat more reticent about meeting others. However, when he did meet someone he always taught them. In this case teaching doesn't necessarily mean teaching with words, but teaching with the whole being.

The presence of the Master is the most direct form of Buddhist teaching. This was, of course, also true for Master Enen. So even though their words seem quite different, the viewpoints of the two Masters are similar.

NINETY-THREE

When Master Somitsu was sewing, Master Tozan asked: *What are you doing?*

Master Somitsu said: *I am sewing.*

Master Tozan said: *How is your sewing?*

Master Somitsu said: *In sewing, almost every stitch is the same.*

Master Tozan said: *Even though we have been traveling together for twenty years, is this all you can say? Doesn't anything else come into it?*

Master Somitsu said: *What do you think, Acarya?*

Master Tozan said: *The whole earth seems to burst into flames.*

Commentary

Master Shinzan Somitsu and Master Tozan Ryokai had studied and practiced together for twenty years. In the statements of the two monks we can see their different perspectives, their different ways of viewing reality. We cannot say either is more correct than the other. Reality includes both.

Master Somitsu was concentrating very hard on his task. When asked to express the reality of the situation Master Somitsu said that each stitch is almost the same as the last. From one perspective, then, life can be seen as repeating the same simple task, again and again. But this is only one side of the picture.

At each moment, with each action, reality appears; the earth bursts into flames. We can see life as a process of repeating the same simple tasks, or as the whole Universe bursting forth in the moment of the present.

NINETY-FOUR

One day Master Ungo was asked by a monk: *I feel that I have understood something. Why can't we recognize this reality in front of us?*

Master Ungo said: *This reality in front of us is not something that is born.*

Then the monk said: *What kind of state is it in, if it is not born?*

Master Ungo said: *It does not disappear.*

The monk said: *Where is it, then, before it is born?*

The Master said: *The place where it exists cannot be grasped.*

The monk said: *If reality is like that, where can it disappear to?*

Master Ungo said: *Reality never disappears.*

Commentary

The phrase "*this reality in front of us*" is a translation of *jumo*, which literally means "what" or "it" or "something." The word was used in Buddhism in China and Japan to describe the ineffable reality that is here and now, but that cannot be fully described with words.

Master Ungo's discussion with the monk is closely related to the Buddhist understanding of time. Usually we think of time as flowing along a line that goes from the past through the present to the future. Things and events have a beginning somewhere on this line and an end at another point.

However, in Buddhism reality is seen as existing only in the moment. The past and the future are mental images, ideas, memories, dreams that exist only in the present. All our images of the past and future exist right now in this present moment.

The present moment is not born (does not arise) and does not disappear; it is always present. It is only when we hold the mental images of the past and future that we can talk about things arising and disappearing. The present moment cannot be enclosed or grasped. When we reach to grasp the present moment, it has already become a mental image – something in the past.

NINETY-FIVE

One day Master Unmon was asked by a monk: *While he was alive, what did Gautama Buddha teach?*

Master Unmon said: *Gautama Buddha taught to suit the individual facts in front of him.*

Then the monk asked: *What did he do when the question was not about the real facts in front of him?*

Master Unmon answered: *Gautama Buddha gave a generalized talk.*

Commentary

Master Unmon said that Gautama Buddha taught in a way that matched each concrete situation. Gautama Buddha's teaching arose out of the particular situations and people that he was dealing with.

The monk then asked how Gautama Buddha responded to questions that were more abstract, that concerned situations that were not in front of him. The Master said that when it was necessary, Gautama Buddha taught in a more generalized way.

These answers are simple and realistic. When faced by actual circumstances, he responded to the actual circumstances. When faced with a theoretical or generalized question, he answered in a generalized way.

NINETY-SIX

Master Fuke went to a patron's house with Master Rinzai to eat lunch.

Master Rinzai asked: *It is said in the sutras that a hair swallows the great ocean and a poppy seed encompasses Mount Sumeru. Are these also cases of "mystical abilities" or "splendid functions," or are they just the real fact as it is?*

Then Master Fuke turned the table and the meal upside down.

Master Rinzai said: *What a rude man!*

Master Fuke said: *This place where we exist is ineffable. Why do you sometimes call it rude and sometimes call it polite?*

Master Rinzai did not say anything.

The next day the two masters again went to have lunch with a family.

Master Rinzai asked: *Is the offering today better or worse than yesterday?*

Again Master Fuke upset the table.

Master Rinzai said: *What a rude man!*

Master Fuke said: *You are blind. How can Buddhism preach rudeness or excellence?*

Master Rinzai stuck out his tongue.

Commentary

Master Chinshu Fuke was a somewhat eccentric person. He wandered from temple to temple with his belongings in a sack, and he became the model for "Hotei-san," the Happy Buddha.

Master Fuke and Master Rinzai were invited to lunch with a patron, where Master Rinzai hoped to begin a philosophical discussion by asking about the sutras. Master Fuke would have none of it. He immediately upset the table.

His seemingly bizarre behavior can be understood if we look at it with the help of Buddhist logic. Master Rinzai's question was in the first phase of Buddhist logic: the realm of ideas and spirit. Many people who set out to study Buddhism never advance beyond this point.

The second phase is a materialistic viewpoint which rejects or contradicts the first. Thus Master Fuke showed his rejection of the spiritual phase by drawing

attention to the concrete facts of the situation. He countered Master Rinzai's accusation of rudeness by saying that rudeness and politeness were only concepts which could not be found in reality itself.

On the following day, Master Rinzai opened the conversation with another question that upset Master Fuke, who wanted to show him that eating a meal is just real conduct in the present; it transcends thoughts of good or bad.

The kind of eccentric behavior that Master Fuke exhibited has been overemphasized by some modern commentators on Zen. Master Dogen did not esteem such behavior very highly.

It is true that such behavior demonstrates the rejection of idealism and conceptual knowledge. But it is not, in the end, good behavior. Master Fuke was upset; the whole meal was upset. To start eating the meal right now is to transcend thoughts about better or worse than yesterday.

NINETY-SEVEN

There was a monk who was planning to build a monument to Master Sozan Konin. Having finished his plan, he went to tell his master.

Master Sozan asked the monk: *How much money will you pay the builder?*

The monk said: *It is entirely up to you.*

The Master replied: *Should you pay him three coins, two coins, or only one? If you can answer me, you can start to build the monument immediately.*

The monk didn't have an answer.

At this time Master Razan Dokan was living in a hut on Daiyu Peak. The monk went to Master Razan and told him the story.

Master Razan asked: *Was anyone able to answer the Master?*

The monk said: *No one could answer him.*

Master Razan said: *Go back to Master Sozan and say, "If you give three coins to the builder, the Master will surely not see the monument during his lifetime. If you pay two coins to the builder, the Master and the builder will be able to join hands. If you pay the builder only one coin, the builder will work reluctantly and the Master's eyebrows and beard will fall out before it is finished."*

The monk went straight back to Master Sozan and repeated these words. When Master Sozan heard this, he drew himself together in a dignified manner and prostrated in the direction of Daiyu Peak, saying, *"I had thought there was no one around who realized the truth, but in fact there is an Eternal Buddha on Daiyu Peak, and his illuminating light pierces even this place."*

Master Sozan told the monk: *Go back to Daiyu Peak and say this: "The Master's words are like finding a lotus blossom in December."*

The monk went to Master Razan and reported those words to him.

Master Razan said: *I spoke my words and his response was lightning-quick. The hair on the tortoise has sprung out three feet!*

Commentary

Master Sozan Konin asked the monk to decide how much to pay the builder. The monk didn't have an answer, but later when Master Razan Dokan heard the story he chose the middle way. If the builder were paid three coins it would be excessive. The builder would surely take the money and disappear.

If the builder were paid only one coin he would work reluctantly and Master Sozan's eyebrows and beard would fall off with age before the monument was completed. However, if the extremes were avoided, the builder and Master could cooperate with each other easily and the monument would be constructed quickly.

Master Sozan praised Master Razan's words, saying that they were as rare as a lotus blossom in December. Since the lotus blooms in the spring, a December blossom is rare indeed.

Master Razan praised the speed of Master Sozan's answer using a Chinese proverb. The tortoise is a slow mover, and has no hair. So the image of hair suddenly springing out of a tortoise is one of astonishment. Master Razan was astonished at receiving Master Sozan's acknowledgment so quickly.

NINETY-EIGHT

When Master Tozan Ryokai was feeling ill, a monk asked: *Master! You are ill. Is there anyone who does not get ill?*

The Master said: *There is.*

The monk asked: *If there is a person who does not get ill, they can take care of you.*

The Master said: *I can take care of people who don't get ill.*

The monk said: *What state are you in when you care for someone who doesn't get ill?*

The Master said: *When I care for them, I can see that "illness" does not exist.*

Commentary

We all feel ill from time to time. And to an extent we can control our state of health by leading a balanced life. However, the monk put Master Tozan in a category – he was ill. Master Tozan thought that we shouldn't look at illness as something fixed: now I am ill – now I am well.

When he said that he could take care of people who do not get ill, he meant that there is no absolute state of being ill. Who is ill? Who is well? Health and illness are relative states.

Sometimes people who are ill can encourage people who are well. When they do this, they can see that the concept of "illness" is relative. Our real state does not always fall into clear categories.

NINETY-NINE

Layman Ho-on asked Master Baso: *You are someone who is clear about our original state. Please say something uplifting.*

Master Baso looked straight downwards.

The layman continued: *Like a musical instrument which has no strings, you, Master, are the only one who can play.*

Master Baso looked straight up. The layman prostrated himself at once.

Master Baso went back to his private room and the layman followed him. The layman entered the room and said: *I played at being skillful, but I have found how unskillful I am.*

Commentary

The Master was clear about his original state, so the layman thought the Master should say something that would be on a high moral level.

However, the layman only had his concept of “the original state.” He had not experienced it for himself.

In order to show the layman that the original state was different from the layman’s conception of it, the Master did the opposite of what the monk expected – he cast his eyes down toward the ground.

The layman realized the meaning of Master Baso’s gesture, and so praised the Master’s state highly. Then Master Baso looked straight up. He changed himself into the opposite of what the layman had just praised so highly. This opposite condition was also the original state; beyond high or low.

The layman realized that he had only been playing with the concept of the original state. When confronted with the reality of the state he realized his mistake.

ONE HUNDRED

One day a monk asked Master Unmon: *What is the Ascending Dharma Body?*

The Master said: *To explain Ascending to you would not be difficult, but what do you think the meaning of Dharma Body is?*

The monk said: *Please, Master, find the meaning yourself.*

The Master said: *Setting aside the meaning for a while, what do you think the Dharma Body means?*

The monk said: *It means that everything is just as it is.*

The Master said: *That answer is simply what you learned on the long floor of the Zazen Hall. I ask you, does the Dharma Body eat meals?*

The monk could not reply.

Commentary

The Dharma Body, or Universal Body (*hosshin*) refers to one of the three bodies of a buddha. It describes the body when it is one with the Universe in the present moment. The Master wanted the monk to express his understanding of Dharma Body, and after some prodding the monk replied that it meant everything being just as it is; reality just as it is here and now.

The Master felt that the monk was expressing something of the state that he had learned through his long hours in the Zazen Hall, but it was still an intellectual answer. He wanted to see if the monk could apply what he knew in a more concrete way. So he asked if the Dharma Body ate meals.

The Dharma Body is the body of a real person who practices a Buddhist life. So, of course, it must consume meals every day. The monk was unable to say anything because his understanding was still a little too abstract.

BOOK TWO

ONE

Master Nangaku Ejo became a disciple of the Sixth Patriarch, Master Daikan Eno.

The Sixth Patriarch asked: *Where have you come from?*

Master Nangaku said: *I have come from Master Ankoku on Mount Su.*

The Sixth Patriarch said: *Something ineffable has come like this.*

Master Nangaku could not reply. He then served the Sixth Patriarch for eight years. He eventually came to understand the words of the Sixth Patriarch and said to him: *I, Ejo, have understood. When I first came here, Master, you accepted me with the words, "Something ineffable has come like this."*

The Patriarch said: *How do you understand the words?*

Master Nangaku said: *If I try to represent it in some way, the explanation does not hit the mark.*

The Patriarch said: *Do you rely upon practice and realization or not?*

Master Nangaku said: *It would not be true if I insisted that there is no practice and no realization. However, it is impossible to taint the situation by distinguishing practice and realization.*

The Patriarch said: *This "not to taint" is just what the many Buddhas wanted to preserve. You are the same as that. I am the same as that, and the many patriarchs in India are also like that.*

Commentary

When Master Nangaku went to the temple of the Sixth Patriarch, the Patriarch said: *"Something ineffable has come like this."* The situation of Nangaku arriving at the temple was the totality of ineffable reality. It was nothing more or less than reality itself.

Master Nangaku did not understand, so he stayed with the Patriarch for eight years. After that time he felt he could understand the words that the Patriarch had spoken on his first day at the temple.

When the Patriarch asked him what he had understood, Master Nangaku said that it was difficult, or impossible for any explanation to capture reality.

The Patriarch asked him further, "*Do you rely upon practice and realization or not?*" Practice means Zazen practice. Realization, often termed *satori* or enlightenment, simply means to recognize reality – to participate in the truth. Too often people think that practice and realization are separate. They think that Zazen is the practice or the means whereby we reach a goal called realization or enlightenment.

Master Nangaku refused to taint the reality of the situation by separating the two. Sitting in Zazen is all of reality itself. There is nothing more and nothing less than reality.

TWO

Whenever Master Hyakujo Ekai gave his informal preaching, there was an old man who would always listen to the preaching along with the rest of the assembly. When the assembly retired, the old man would also retire. However, one day he did not leave. Eventually, the Master asked him: *Who is this person that stands before me?*

The old man answered: *I am not a person. Long ago, in the time of Kasyapa Buddha, I was master of this temple. One day, a Buddhist student asked me whether even a great Buddhist practitioner falls into cause and effect. In reply, I said to him, "He does not fall into cause and effect." Since then I have fallen into the body of a wild fox for five hundred lives. So I beg you, Master, to say some words that will change me. I would like to get rid of the wild fox's body. Then he asked: Does someone of great Buddhist practice also fall into cause and effect, or not?*

The Master said: *Do not be unclear about cause and effect.*

At these words the old man realized the truth, and after prostrating himself, he said: *I am already free of the body of a wild fox. Now I would like to remain on the mountain behind this temple. Dare I ask you, Master, to perform the funeral ceremony of a Buddhist monk for me?*

The Master ordered the Supervising Monk to strike the wooden block to summon the monks. Then he told them: *After the meal, we will hold a funeral ceremony for a deceased monk.*

All the monks discussed this among themselves, saying: *The monks are all in good health and no-one is sick in the infirmary. What is the reason for this funeral ceremony?*

After their meal, the Master led the monks to the foot of a big rock behind the temple, and picked out a dead fox with a stick. Then they cremated it following the formal method. In the evening, the Master gave his formal preaching in the Lecture Hall, in which he told the above story.

Then Master Obaku asked: *The words with which the man in the past taught the student were a wrong answer, and so he fell into the body of a wild fox for five hundred lives. If he had gone on without mistakes, what would have become of him?*

Master Hyakujo said: *Step up here. I will tell you.*

Master Obaku went up, and gave the Master a slap. Master Hyakujo clapped his hands, laughed, and said: *Your attitude is like the fact that a foreigner's beard is red, but there is also the viewpoint that a man with a red beard must be a foreigner.*

Commentary

A monk asked the old Master if a person who is in the state of great Buddhist practice is subject to the laws of cause and effect or not. The Master replied that such a person does not fall into cause and effect. For this mistake the Master was reborn for hundreds of years as a fox. Everyone and everything is subject to cause and effect. Even the Buddha was subject to cause and effect.

Is there then no freedom? Is our whole life completely determined? If we look back on the past, it seems that our whole life is bound by cause and effect. However, our human freedom does exist – it exists in the present moment. It exists in our real action here and now. Buddhist Masters – indeed all who practice Zazen – can avoid getting lost in memories of the past or dreams of the future, so we are able to use our freedom.

When we consider time in the usual way, looking back at the past or ahead to the future, then we must say that Buddhist Masters are also bound by cause and effect. When we act in the present moment we can find our freedom. Thus a person of great Buddhist practice is both bound by cause and effect and free of cause and effect.

In the second part of the koan, Master Obaku asked what would have become of the old Master if he had never made such a mistake. He then answered his own question by giving Master Ekai a slap. This slap was not an abstraction, it was a concrete fact. The Master laughed and said, *"Your attitude is like the fact that a foreigner's beard is red."* This was a Chinese expression about inductive reasoning, i.e., going from concrete facts to general principles. (A is a foreigner with a red beard. B is a foreigner with a red beard. Therefore, all foreigners have red beards.)

The Master then said there is also the fact that a red beard indicates a foreigner. This expression represents deductive reasoning – going from general principles to more specific conclusions. (Foreigners have red beards. A has a red beard. Therefore, A is a foreigner.) The Master agreed that Obaku understood concrete facts but warned him that other perspectives and viewpoints also existed.

Although this story mentions the idea of "five hundred lives" we should not think of it as suggesting that Buddhism holds the view of reincarnation. This

koan illustrates one aspect of the fundamental Buddhist view on cause and effect – it is not a description of historical fact. Master Dogen discusses cause and effect in detail in Shobogenzo *Sanji-no-go* (*Karma in Three Times*) and *Shinjin-inga* (*Deep Belief in Cause and Effect*).

THREE

Master Isan Reiyu on Mount Dai-I was practicing Zazen. At that time Master Kyozan Ejaku was standing near the Master.

Then the Master said: *Ejaku, what about the problem of finding a successor in the lineage of this temple?*

Master Kyozan said: *Many people are seriously concerned about that problem.*

The Master said: *What about you, Ejaku?*

Master Kyozan said: *When I am tired I just close my eyes; when I am alert I just practice Zazen. So I have never done any preaching.*

The Master said: *So you have arrived at that state. But is it difficult for you to attain the truth?*

Master Kyozan said: *I feel that I cannot possibly find even one word to express the truth.*

The Master said: *It is only you who is deciding that it is impossible for you to attain the truth.*

Master Kyozan said: *From ancient times, all the masters were also like that.*

The Master said: *There may be someone who laughs loudly at your reply.*

Master Kyozan said: *A man who can laugh at me must be in exactly the same state as me.*

The Master said: *Let me see what your real conduct is like.*

Master Kyozan walked once around the Zazen platform.

The Master said: *Your conduct has smashed the past and the present into pieces.*

Commentary

Master Kyozan Ejaku said that many people were seriously concerned about who would be the next master of the temple. Master Isan Reiyu asked Ejaku how he would be as the next master of the temple. Master Kyozan said that he had never preached a sermon. He had just lived his ordinary life practicing Zazen when he was alert and sleeping when he was tired.

Master Isan thought that this was a very good answer and asked Kyozan if he could not attain the truth in such an excellent state. Master Kyozan said that it was impossible for him to say even one word because no word or words can ever capture reality. He said that all of the masters from the ancient time to the present had been in the same state.

Master Isan said that there might be some people who would laugh at such a statement. Kyozan was not concerned; anyone who laughed at him would be in the same state as Kyozan himself.

The Master asked Kyozan to demonstrate his state concretely. Master Kyozan did this by walking around the Zazen platform. The Master strongly affirmed this simple behavior.

FOUR

Master Tokuzan Senkan had been a teacher of the Diamond Sutra for a long time. One day he heard of a Buddhist sect based on Zazen that was flourishing in the southern part of China. He felt that he had to leave his life there, stopping his teaching after so long and dispersing his students. Then he traveled south carrying all his commentaries.

First he arrived at Master Ryutan Soshin's temple. Just after passing through the gate he said: *I have heard of the fame of Ryutan for so long. But now I have arrived, I find there is no profound pool and there is no dragon that appears* ("ryu" means dragon, and "tan" means pool).

Master Ryutan said: *You have arrived at Ryutan in person.*

Master Tokuzan prostrated himself and retired.

That night Master Tokuzan entered the Master's private room, and remained standing there until late into the night.

Master Ryutan said: *Why don't you retire?*

Eventually Master Tokuzan bowed down, lifted the bamboo curtain and left.

Seeing that it was dark outside, he returned to the Master and said: *It is dark outside.*

Then Master Ryutan lit a paper torch and gave it to Master Tokuzan. Just as Master Tokuzan was about to take the torch, Master Ryutan suddenly blew it out.

Master Tokuzan understood the truth immediately. He prostrated himself at once.

Master Ryutan said: *What have you seen, that you prostrate yourself?*

Master Tokuzan said: *From now on, I have absolutely no doubts in what you, old Master of this world, say.*

On the next day, Master Ryutan held a formal lecture in the Lecture Hall and said: *There is a concrete man in a concrete situation. His teeth are as if sawn from a tree. His mouth is like a bloody bowl. When I strike him with a stick he does not turn his head to me. In the future he may establish my truth on the top of a lonely mountain.*

Then Master Tokuzan took his commentaries to the front of the Lecture Hall, and, holding a burning torch high, he said: *Even though I searched for profundity in my many speeches, the situation was that of one hair manifesting the whole of space, and even though I expressed the most important matter in the world, the situation was like that of a dewdrop falling onto a boulder.* Then he burnt the commentaries, prostrated himself, and left the temple.

Commentary

Master Tokuzan had been preaching the Diamond Sutra for a long time, so when he heard that Buddhism was flourishing in the South, he loaded up his books and headed South. When he got there he was not impressed. No one seemed to know as much about the Diamond Sutra as he did.

One night, Tokuzan stayed in Master Ryutan's room for a long time. When he started to leave he discovered that it had become dark. Master Ryutan offered him a torch. Just as Tokuzan was going to take it, Master Ryutan blew out the light. This startling action woke Tokuzan from his intellectual slumber. In the sudden darkness Master Tokuzan was able to catch a glimpse of reality.

At the end of the koan Master Tokuzan expresses a more humble attitude. Tokuzan had thought he was being very profound, but even a single hair manifests all of space, and all of Tokuzan's words were no more important or profound than a single dewdrop falling upon a boulder and evaporating away.

Master Tokuzan then burned all his commentaries to show that he was finished with his former knowledge. Master Dogen sometimes criticized this kind of extreme behavior. He favored a more balanced view. Sutras, commentaries and intellectual knowledge have their place in the study of Buddhism – the problem comes if we think they are all of Buddhism.

FIVE

Master Ungan asked Master Dogo: *What does Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva do with so many hands and eyes?*

Master Dogo said: *It is like someone stretching out a hand behind their head at night, looking for the pillow.*

Master Ungan said: *I understand. I understand.*

Master Dogo said: *What do you understand?*

Master Ungan said: *Hands and eyes exist throughout the body.*

Master Dogo said: *Your words describe the situations nicely, but only about eighty or ninety percent.*

Master Ungan asked: *What would you say?*

Master Dogo said: *The whole body is just hands and eyes.*

Commentary

Avalokitesvara is traditionally the Bodhisattva of Compassion. It is said that he has thousands of eyes and thousands of hands with which to save all beings.

Master Dogo said that Avalokitesvara was like a person stretching out a hand at night to locate a pillow behind their head. He thus saw Avalokitesvara as a very natural basic life force.

Master Ungan expressed his view as hands and eyes existing throughout the body, but Master Dogo thought this implied some separation between hands and body, so he tried to express it more accurately with *"The whole body is just hands and eyes."* We can see our life itself as the natural functioning of Avalokitesvara's many hands and eyes.

SIX

Master Ryutan, who made rice cakes for a living, prostrated himself in front of Master Tenno and became a Buddhist monk.

Master Tenno said: *If you serve me, I will preach to you about the fundamentally important Dharma gate.*

Almost one year passed.

One day, Master Ryutan said: *When I came here, Master, you said you would explain the Buddhist teaching about the fundamentally important Dharma gate. So far I haven't received your teaching.*

Master Tenno said: *But I have been preaching it to you for a long time.*

Master Ryutan said: *When did you preach the teaching to me?*

Master Tenno said: *When you greeted me, I joined my hands at once. When I was sitting, you were standing near me. When you brought me a cup of tea, I took it from you.*

Master Ryutan didn't say anything for a while.

Master Tenno said: *Opinion is just a point of view. What you see is just what you see. When we have doubts and think about things, it becomes different.*

Master Ryutan attained the truth at once.

Commentary

After Master Ryutan Soshin became a disciple of Master Tenno Dogo, he felt that he received no verbal teachings from his master. After a year had passed, Master Ryutan asked Master Tenno why this was so, but Master Tenno replied that their day-to-day life was just Buddhist teaching.

When Master Tenno expressed this idea, Ryutan did not say anything for a moment while he reflected on what he had been told. Master Tenno cut these reflections short by saying *"Opinions are just opinions."* He wanted to say that although Master Ryutan thought that he had not received any teachings, in fact, he had. He was saying that although some opinions are more correct than others, the most important thing is to recognize the difference between opinions and reality. No matter how correct they may be, opinions are just a product of the mind. Reality is something much more than this. Master Tenno wanted

Ryutan to recognize reality directly. He had been teaching this reality to Ryutan for a year.

Ryutan's complaint seems natural enough. Master Tenno had promised to teach him about the importance of mind. However, a year had passed and nothing had been said about the importance of mind or any other subject related to Buddhist theory. Even so, Master Tenno was surprised by the complaint. When had he ever neglected to teach Ryutan? When Ryutan greeted him had he not returned the greeting? When Ryutan offered him some tea had he not accepted it gratefully? Master Tenno's daily behavior had been his teaching of the Buddha Dharma.

SEVEN

Master Unmon said: *When light does not permeate freely, there are two kinds of sickness. When we cannot understand anything, but there is something in front of us – that is one. And when we look at the whole Universe as if it is empty, it still seems as if there are concrete things. In this situation, light does not permeate freely.*

At the same time, there are also two kinds of sickness in the Dharma body. Even though we can attain the Dharma body, because we do not forget attachment to the Dharma, selfish opinions remain, and we can only wander around the vicinity of the Dharma body. This is one. But if you study such problems in detail and yet cling to your own ideas, then it does not mean anything. This is another sickness.

Commentary

Master Unmon describes four errors or “sicknesses” that people may fall into when “*the light does not permeate freely,*” that is, when reality itself does not manifest in our mind and body, and our state is dark.

When the Buddhist teachings are not fully understood there are two problems: one is that nothing is clarified – which is the state where we know what is in front of us but we don’t know what it really is. This refers to ordinary people’s state – people don’t know what the world is – but at the same time they cannot deny that something concrete is in front of them. This is one sickness. Another sickness suggests the state of someone who has studied Buddhism and misunderstands the concept of sunyata or emptiness. Even if we think all things are empty, we cannot deny the concrete phenomena in front of us.

Then Master Unmon discussed a sickness concerning the “Dharma Body.” In some Buddhist theories there is a concept of the “Three Bodies.” One is the Dharma Body – this is the view that we can see the world as the Dharma that exists from the infinite past to the infinite future. The second body refers to the physical body that is a result of action in the past. The third body is the body that acts in the present moment. Master Unmon’s sickness of the Dharma Body refers to clinging to our own ideas and opinions, even concerning the Dharma. The second problem is when someone feels that they have attained a state of freedom through Buddhist practice, however, their idea of freedom leads them

to deny reality. This also is a sickness. So this last mistake is to give up or deny the value of the Buddhist teachings.

Buddhist theories are not the reality which they describe. Some people think that this means we should abandon them entirely or that we can behave as we like, once we have glimpsed reality. However, there must always be a balance. We must not become attached to the teachings or we can never “enter” reality. On the other hand, we must not discard the teachings or we will become arrogant and become stuck in our own situations. Master Unmon’s somewhat abstruse discussion concerns these types of problems.

EIGHT

A monk asked Master Baso: *Please tell me Master Bodhidharma's intention in coming to China from India, without using four-lined poems or the "hundred denials."*

Master Baso said: *I am very tired today. I cannot explain it to you. Ask Master Chizo.*

The monk asked the question to Master Chizo.

Master Chizo said: *Why don't you ask the Master.*

The monk said: *The Master told me to come to ask you.*

Master Chizo said: *I have a headache today, so I cannot explain it to you. Please ask my elder brother monk Kai.*

The monk then asked Master Hyakujo Ekai.

Master Ekai said: *In spite of having arrived at the here and now, the strange fact is I cannot fully comprehend what has happened.*

The monk told these words to Master Baso.

Master Baso said: *Chizo's head is white. Ekai's head is black.*

Commentary

The monk asked Master Baso to teach him the essence of Buddhism without relying on traditional scriptures or negative logic. Since it is impossible to express this essence in words, both Master Baso and Master Seido Chizo refused to answer the question. Master Hyakujo Ekai was more forthcoming, but not much. He said that although he had arrived at the state of truth, he could not really understand it rationally. Reality cannot be understood in this way.

When the monk reported the words to Master Baso, he said that Chizo's head was white and Ekai's was black. Usually white hair is associated with age and wisdom, so perhaps Master Baso was indicating his preference for Chizo's answer, since Chizo refused to answer the question in any fashion. However, both responses were equally excellent, so it is also possible that Master Baso was simply pointing out the difference between the characters of the two masters. Two different responses expressing the same single fact – that there is no way to put this moment into words.

NINE

One day Master Seppo said to Great Master So-itsu in Gensa temple in Fukushu: *When the width of the world is ten feet, the width of the eternal mirror is ten feet.*

Master Gensa, pointing to the brazier, said: *What is the width of the brazier?*

Master Seppo said: *It is the same as the width of the eternal mirror.*

Master Gensa said: *It appears that the old Master's heels are not touching the ground.*

Commentary

The eternal mirror has a long history in Buddhist discourse. It is used to represent a number of related concepts. The function of a mirror is to reflect what is before it. If the mirror is a good one it will perform its function without distortion. It is often used as a metaphor for the functioning of the reflective mind, or more specifically in this story, intuition. In Buddhism intuition is called *prajna*, literally, “before knowing.” This refers to our original natural wisdom before we conceptualize the world. We can say that it reflects the real situation without distortion. However, *prajna* or the eternal mirror does not just reflect reality – it is reality itself. Master Dogen said that the eternal mirror was each concrete place and time throughout this splendid Universe.

The unity of the subjective and objective can be seen in Master Seppo’s statement, “*When the world is ten feet wide, the width of the eternal mirror is ten feet.*” Master Gensa pointed to a concrete object and asked about its width. Master Seppo said it is the same as the width of the mirror. Master Gensa criticized this statement. He was a very down-to-earth person, and may have felt that Master Seppo’s attitude was a little too abstract; he wanted to hear a more concrete or matter-of-fact answer, like seven feet or eight feet. Master Dogen discusses this story in detail in *Shobogenzo Kokyo (The Eternal Mirror)*.

TEN

One day Master Isan Reiyu asked his students to express the truth in their own words, saying: *I would like to meet you in the area which is outside of sound and form.*

Acarya Kanko from Yushu was there. The Acarya said: *I do not refuse to do so, but I wonder whether anyone would have the eyes to see what I said?*

Master Isan did not affirm these words.

Master Kyozan presented his expression of the truth a total of four times. First he said: *I look at what it is impossible to look at.*

Master Isan said: *Your expression is as fine as powder, and as cold as snow or frost.*

Master Kyozan said a second time: *Why should we need to meet someone outside of perception?*

Master Isan said: *You are sitting right in the sravaka's strange chair.*

Master Kyozan said for a third time: *It is like two mirrors reflecting each other, but there is no image between the two mirrors.*

Master Isan said: *Those words are right. I agree with the words, but you cannot agree with the words because you have placed an image between the two mirrors.*

So Master Kyozan asked Master Isan: *My spirit is dark and clouded, so my answers are not good. I wonder what words you used when you were studying under Master Hyakujo.*

Master Isan said: *When I was studying under my late master, Hyakujo, this is how I expressed it: When hundreds or thousands of bright mirrors reflect images, light and images reflect each other, but at the same time, each minute molecule is totally independent and does not rely upon others. At these words, Master Kyozan prostrated himself.*

Commentary

Master Isan wanted to test his students so he said he would like to meet them in the area outside of sound and form, that is, the area outside of perception.

The first student said that he could represent the truth but he doubted that anyone would understand it. Master Isan did not affirm these words.

The next student, Kyozan, tried several times to give an adequate answer. His first answer refers to the subjective world. The Master said his answer was very precise but there was no warmth in it, no vitality.

Master Isan dismissed Kyozan's second answer as being similar to the ideas of the sravakas who study Buddhism theoretically or intellectually.

In his third answer Kyozan used the metaphor of two mirrors facing each other. The first mirror represents the thinking function or subjective realm. The other mirror represents sense perception or the materialistic realm. The metaphor of the two mirrors facing each other shows how reality is reflected in these two different ways. Master Isan affirmed these words, but he doubted that Kyozan really understood them. He thought that though the words were good they only represented an intellectual image in Kyozan's brain and did not represent his true state. Master Isan then presented his own words. He used the image of hundreds of thousands of bright mirrors each one reflecting the light and each other. This represents the vast kaleidoscope of reality – everything related to and dependent on everything else. However, this is only one side of reality, or one way of looking at reality. We can also say that even the smallest particle and every moment is complete and independent in itself.

ELEVEN

One day Master Hogen was clearing the ground around a spring that had become filled with sand. He said to a monk who was with him: *The eye of the spring was closed because it was blocked up. When eyes for seeing the truth are closed, what blocks them?*

The monk had no answer.

Master Hogen answered for the student: *They are blocked by eyes.*

Commentary

The eyes that look for the truth cannot see it because of those eyes. The mind that searches for the truth cannot find it because of that mind.

The eyes that search for the truth are themselves the truth. They have their truth as eyes. The mind that searches for reality is living in reality at every moment of its search.

TWELVE

One day, Master Keichin of Jizo Temple was asked by Master Gensa Shibi: *People say that the three kinds of world are just mind. How do you understand this?*

Master Keichin pointed to a chair and said: *What do you call this, Master?*

Master Gensa said: *A chair.*

Master Keichin said: *You, Master, do not understand that the three kinds of world are just mind.*

Master Gensa said: *I call this bamboo and wood. What do you call it?*

Master Keichin said: *I also call it bamboo and wood.*

Master Gensa said: *Throughout the great earth it is impossible for us to find a man who understands Buddhism.*

Commentary

Master Gensa Shibi wanted to test Master Rakan Keichin's understanding of the relation between mind and the objective world. From the Buddhist viewpoint there is only one world, one reality, but ordinary people divide this reality into three different worlds: volition (mind), matter, and non-matter (or action). Ordinary people take hold of one of these divisions or viewpoints and come to believe that it is the whole of reality. As Buddhists, we should not forget that they are merely different viewpoints of one reality.

Master Gensa asked about the saying that the three worlds are just mind. In response Master Keichin pointed to a chair and asked, "*What do you call this?*" He rejected Master Gensa's first answer of "*a chair,*" but affirmed his second answer of "*bamboo and wood.*"

If we look at these answers on the basis of Buddhist logic, we see that "*a chair*" is based on the first viewpoint because it refers to function or meaning. Another answer on the same level might have been, for example, firewood. This would have assigned a different meaning and function to the same reality. Master Gensa's second answer is based on the viewpoint of materialism. This answer disregards value and function and takes into account only the material constituents of reality.

Master Gensa's question at this point, "*What do you call it?*" represents a sincere attempt to go beyond his first two answers. It thus corresponds to the third phase of Buddhist logic.

Master Gensa's last words reflect the fourth or ultimate viewpoint. He said, "*It is impossible for us to find anyone who understands Buddhism.*" Understanding usually means the subjective experience of comprehending some objective situation or fact. But reality is not an object to be understood intellectually. It encompasses and transcends both the objective and subjective worlds. It thus defies any attempt to classify it or understand it from either an objective or subjective viewpoint.

THIRTEEN

Master Keichin of Raku Temple asked a monk of Master Hofuku's Temple: *How does Master Hofuku preach Buddhism to others?*

The monk said: *One day Master Hofuku said to an assembly, "Close your eyes so that you cannot see anything. Close your ears so that you cannot hear anything. Practice Zazen until you are able to stop thinking."*

Master Keichin said: *I would like to ask you this. If I do not instruct you to close your eyes, do you see something? If I do not instruct you to close your ears, do you hear anything? If you sit in the origin of thought, can you think of something?*

On hearing these words, the monk realized the truth.

Commentary

Master Keichin asked a student of Master Hofuku about his master's way of teaching. The monk said Master Hofuku instructed the assembly to close their eyes, to close their ears, not to see, and not to hear; to simply sit, and not to think abstractly or intellectually. Master Hofuku told his students that the aim of Zazen is to stop seeing, hearing, and thinking.

Master Keichin pointed out that it is not necessary to make intentional efforts to close our eyes and ears; simply sitting in the posture of Zazen allows people to transcend what they see and hear, and to transcend what they think. The state in Zazen is non-intentional. Hearing Master Keichin's words, the monk realized the Buddhist truth. The story illustrates that the aim in Zazen is not looking, listening, or thinking about something. However, neither is it intentionally trying to stop these activities. The act of sitting in Zazen itself transcends these states at once. So Master Keichin's recommendation was simply to practice Zazen.

Although we could consider the approach of Master Hofuku to be different from Master Keichin's, actually they are pointing toward the same reality. Master Hofuku's words point toward the transcending of sense perception, while Master Keichin aims at transcending the denial of sense perception. Neither approach is complete in itself. In Buddhist philosophy these two approaches are combined in the third phase of action; the practice of Zazen itself has no aim other than the practice, and the monks' realization can be seen as expressing the fourth phase – reality itself.

FOURTEEN

A monk asked Master Joshu: *Does even a dog have Buddha-nature?*

Master Joshu said: *It does.*

The monk said: *If it has Buddha-nature already, why does it stuff itself into a concrete bag of skin?*

Master Joshu said: *It knows how things are and does it purposely.*

Another monk asked: *Does even a dog have Buddha-nature?*

Master Joshu said: *It does not.*

The monk said: *If all living beings without exception have Buddha-nature, why do you say that a dog doesn't have it?*

Master Joshu said: *Because our mental viewpoint is produced by our experiences in the past.*

Commentary

In the first phase, the idealistic phase of Buddhism, it is said that all beings have Buddha-nature. In his first answer Master Joshu affirmed this view. The monk wanted to know why it is necessary for the dog to take its concrete form as a dog, if it already has Buddha-nature. The Master's reply suggests the concrete fact; a dog is a dog just because of its dog-form. In affirming its own state, it is totally itself. And in being totally itself it has Buddha-nature. In response to the second monk's question he refuted his previous answer. From the second materialistic viewpoint we cannot find any Buddha-nature in the objective world. The dog exists as something real, beyond any concept of Buddha-nature. We cannot understand the true nature of a dog using the fixed viewpoint that we have built up from our conceptual understanding. In being totally itself, the dog both *is* Buddha-nature, and is *beyond* all our concepts of "Buddha-nature."

Master Dogen discusses this story in *Shobogenzo Bussho (Buddha-nature)*. He strongly criticized those who identified Buddha-nature with some concept of soul or spirit. He maintained that Buddha-nature is not some subjective or idealistic quality, nor limited to objective things such as fences, walls, tiles, and pebbles. It is something real and manifest, beyond any dualistic viewpoint.

FIFTEEN

In former times, Master Isan Reiyu preached to an assembly: *No living beings have Buddha-nature.*

At the same time, Master Enkan Sai-an one day preached to an assembly: *All living beings have Buddha-nature.*

In the order of Master Enkan there were two monks, and eventually they purposefully set off for the order of Master Isan Reiyu to resolve this problem. Arriving at the order, although they listened to Master Isan's preaching, they could not fathom the Master's teachings at all. They were rather proud of themselves, and one day when they were sitting in the garden, they saw Master Kyozan coming.

They decided to taunt Master Kyozan by saying: *Elder brother monk, we recommend that you study Buddhism diligently. Don't slacken off!*

Master Kyozan drew a circle in the air, spread out his two arms and, leaning backwards, spread out his arms again. (As if spreading out a sheet.) Then he asked the two monks to reply. The two monks were astonished and did not know what they should do.

Master Kyozan exhorted them, saying: *You should study Buddhism diligently right away. Don't slacken off!*

Then he said good-bye and left.

As the two monks were returning to Master Enkan's order, after traveling some miles, one of them suddenly realized something. So he said passionately: *We should be clear that Master Isan's words that no living beings have Buddha-nature cannot be wrong.* Then he returned to Isan.

The other one went several miles further. And when he was crossing a river, he had a realization too. He said to himself fervently: *The words of Master Isan that no living beings have Buddha-nature are excellent and it is natural for him to say so.* He also returned to Isan.

Commentary

From the subjective or idealistic perspective we can say that all beings have Buddha-nature. From the materialistic phase we can say that living beings do

not have Buddha-nature. Neither viewpoint by itself presents a complete view of reality. They are both only partial views.

Two disciples of Master Enkan Sai-an went to Master Isan's temple. However, they had no understanding of what Master Isan was trying to say. They felt their own position was superior and took great pride in their supposed knowledge of Buddhism. They taunted Kyozan, one of the monks in Master Isan's order, telling him to be more diligent in his study of Buddhism. Master Kyozan responded with actual concrete behavior and the monks, despite their knowledge of Buddhism, were left completely speechless. Knowledge of Buddhist concepts is not enough. Buddhism is a religion of actual behavior, of reality itself.

One reason for Master Isan's "*No living beings have Buddha-nature.*" was precisely to prevent his students from becoming stuck in an idealistic viewpoint. With the help of Master Isan's "shocking" statement and Master Kyozan's behavior the monks were able to escape their limited viewpoint and enter reality.

SIXTEEN

Master Nangaku Ejo from Mount Nangaku one day was asked by a monk: *When a mirror is cast into a statue, where does the light of the mirror go?*

The Master said: *Reverend monk, where have the face and form you had before you became a monk gone?*

The monk said: *When the statue is made, why does it not reflect?*

The Master said: *Even though it does not reflect anything, it cannot deceive others.*

Commentary

The light of a (bronze) mirror that has been recast into a statue and the monk's previous face and form are both memories in the present moment. The reality is now; a statue and a monk.

The monk asked why the statue did not reflect light. Perhaps the monk was asking why he was unable to reflect the truth even though he had become a monk. Master Nangaku said that the statue had its own value as a statue. There was no reason to burden the statue with abstract ideas concerning the reflection of light. The statue, just as it was, was fulfilling its function in the Universe. In the same way, the monk, just as he was, was living fully in reality.

SEVENTEEN

A monk asked Master Kinka: *What was the eternal mirror like before it had been polished?*

The Master said: *It was still the eternal mirror.*

The monk asked: *What about after it has been polished.*

The Master said: *It is still the eternal mirror.*

Commentary

The eternal mirror can be seen as prajna; that is, the intuitive wisdom that rests not in thinking or in emotion, but in our pre-conceptual state in the present moment. It can also be seen as representing all material things and phenomena. Thus, by representing both the subjective and objective worlds the eternal mirror becomes a symbol of reality itself.

Many people think that we practice Zazen as a means of “polishing” reality until it becomes visible. This is an idealistic interpretation. Reality exists fully and completely before, during, and after the polishing. When we practice Zazen our basic nature doesn’t change, our individual character doesn’t change – and yet there is some difference!

EIGHTEEN

Master Isan Reiyu asked Master Kyozan Ejaku: *I heard that when you were studying under Master Hyakujo, you answered ten times when asked one question. Is this true?*

Master Kyozan said: *I dare not admit it!*

The Master said: *If you are asked to utter one word about the ascendant state of a buddha, what will you say?*

Master Kyozan was about to open his mouth.

The Master thundered out a *Katsu!*

The Master asked the same question three times. Master Kyozan was about to answer three times. And each time, the Master cried: *Katsu!* Master Kyozan hung his head and said, with tears in his eyes: *My former Master said, "If you meet a man (of the truth) you will get it straight away." And today I have met just that man.*

Then he established the will to the truth and raised cattle for three years.

One day Master Isan ascended the mountain and saw Master Kyozan sitting in Zazen under a tree.

Master Isan touched Master Kyozan on the back with a stick once. Master Kyozan turned his head.

Master Isan said: *Ejaku, have you got the truth or not?*

Master Kyozan said: *I cannot express the truth, but neither do I want to borrow another's mouth.*

The Master said: *Ejaku has understood it.*

Commentary

Master Kyozan was a disciple of Master Isan, but he had gone to study under Master Hyakujo for a while. Master Kyozan's reputed knowledge of Buddhism was so great that Master Isan made fun of him by saying he answered ten questions for each one he was asked. When Master Isan asked him to say something about the ascendant state of a buddha, that is outside the area of intellectual theories, Master Kyozan tried to speak, but Master Isan cut him off

by shouting "*Katsu!*" Three times Kyozan tried to express his ideas but each time Isan shouted him down. Suddenly Kyozan was able to grasp the difference between all his theories and reality itself.

Several years later Master Isan found Kyozan practicing Zazen alone in the mountains. When he asked Kyozan if he had attained the truth, Kyozan did not provide ten different answers. He simply said that although he couldn't express the truth in words, he did not want to use someone else's expression either. The Master affirmed that Kyozan had attained the truth.

NINETEEN

A monk asked Master Joshu: *What was Master Bodhidharma's intention in coming from India in the West to China?*

Master Joshu said: *Cedar trees in the garden.*

The monk said: *Master, don't teach me with objective things.*

Master Joshu said: *I am not teaching you with objective things.*

The monk said: *What was Master Bodhidharma's intention in coming from India to China?*

Master Joshu said: *Cedar trees in the garden.*

Commentary

The monk refused to accept "*cedar trees in the garden*" as an expression of the essence of Buddhism, because he took it as just an expression of an objective situation. However, according to Master Joshu "*cedar trees in the garden*" was not just an expression of objective facts, but reality itself. The objective and subjective worlds are just different viewpoints of one reality.

Bodhidharma's going to China was just his acting in accordance with the real situation at every moment. His intention was just to follow reality at every moment. The real situation at the temple of Master Joshu was that there were cedar trees in the garden. Thus this expression and Master Bodhidharma's action are the same.

Master Dogen discusses this story in detail in *Shobogenzo Hakujuishi (The Cedar Tree)*.

TWENTY

Temple Master Seikei Koshin asked Temple Master Ryusai Shoshu: *I know clearly the essence that transcends appearance and disappearance. Why am I caught up in living?*

Master Shoshu said: *After a bamboo shoot has become a bamboo, can we use the sheath covering the bamboo shoot?*

Master Koshin said: *You will realize what I said one day.*

Master Shoshu said: *This is my state such as it is. Tell me what you think, Acarya.*

Master Koshin said: *This is the room for the head monk of the temple office. And that is the room where the head cook lives.*

At this Master Shoshu prostrated himself.

Commentary

Master Koshin put a rhetorical question to fellow Temple Master Shoshu: Why it is that, although in theory, Buddhism talks about an essence beyond appearance and disappearance, nevertheless we have only this life in front of us, and we can never escape from it. He wanted to suggest by his question the difference between theory and reality.

Master Shoshu took the question literally and explained that the world is constantly changing; the sheath of leaves around the new bamboo shoots (which are commonly used for wrapping food, particularly rice cakes) are no longer there to use when the bamboo has grown.

Master Koshin wanted to emphasize the real meaning of his question, so he said that one day Master Shoshu would see what he was getting at. At this, Master Shoshu replied that he could only reply as he understood the question, that he could only do his best, such as it was.

Master Koshin pointed more directly at what he wanted to express – the nature of reality. He said that in reality, the head of the temple lives in this place, and the head cook lives in that place – that is the way things really are. Then Master Shoshu understood his words and prostrated himself.

TWENTY-ONE

Temple Master Ryosui from the Jushu district became a disciple of Master Mayoku.

When Master Mayoku, saw the Temple Master coming, he picked up a rake and started to rake up the grass.

The Temple Master approached Master Mayoko as he was raking. Master Mayoku purposely avoided looking at the Temple Master, and returned immediately to his own room and closed the door.

On the next day, the Temple Master went to the Master's room again. Master Mayoku closed the door again. In the end, the Temple Master knocked on the door.

Master Mayoku asked: *Who is there?*

The Temple Master said: *Ryosui.*

When he called his own name, he suddenly attained the truth. Then he said: *My Master did not deceive me. If I, Ryosui, hadn't come to prostrate in front of you, I would have wasted my whole life being largely deceived by sutras and commentaries.*

On returning to his own temple, he preached in the Lecture Hall: *What you monks know, I, Ryosui, know in general terms. What I, Ryosui, know is unknown to you.*

In the end he stopped preaching, and said goodbye to his disciples.

Commentary

Master Jushu Ryosui's title in this story is "*Zasu*," which usually suggests a master in a sect that focuses on theoretical Buddhism (the "*sutras and commentaries*" referred to later) and which does not advocate the practice of Zen. Master Ryosui went to the temple of Master Mayoku Hotetsu to receive his teachings, but strangely Master Mayoku seemed to be avoiding him.

Master Mayoku even returned to his room and closed the door behind him. Then Ryosui knocked on the door and the Master naturally called out, "*Who is it?*" Ryosui said his name; but at that moment he was able to realize the person without a name – his real self. The Master's question "*Who?*" refers to this

unnamable person.

After his realization Ryosui returned to his own temple, disbanded his disciples and disappeared. Master Ryosui recognized that the Buddhist truth is very simple, it is reality itself. There is nothing to explain – and so he decided to give no more lectures.

TWENTY-TWO

Master Gensoku was studying in the order of Master Hogen. One day Master Hogen said: *How much time have you spent in this temple?*

Master Gensoku said: *I have already been in your order for three years.*

Master Hogen said: *You are still a recent student. Why don't you ever ask me anything?*

Master Gensoku said: *I dare not lie to you, Master. Previously, when I was in the order of Master Seiho, I attained the concrete state that is comfortable and pleasant.*

Master Hogen said: *What were the words that enabled you to enter this state?*

Master Gensoku said: *I asked Master Seiho, "Who am I, this Buddhist student?" Master Seiho said to me, "A child of fire comes to get fire."*

Master Hogen said: *These are very nice words, but I am afraid that you didn't understand them.*

Master Gensoku said: *Elder and younger brother of fire both belong to fire. So the words mean that fire itself is looking for fire. It means that we ourselves are looking for ourselves.*

Master Hogen said: *Now I am sure that you didn't understand. If Gautama Buddha's teachings had been like that, they would never have survived until the present day.*

Then Master Gensoku became distressed, and stood up to leave at once. However, on the way out, he thought to himself: *The Master is a reverend Buddhist monk, teacher of five hundred men. So what he said when he criticized me must contain great wisdom. So he returned to the Master, and confessed his mistake. Then he asked: Who am I who am studying Buddhism?*

Master Hogen said: *A child of fire coming to get fire.*

With the Master's words, Master Gensoku truly attained the truth.

Commentary

Master Ho-on Gensoku thought he had already attained a full understanding of Buddhism. However, when Master Hogen Bun-eki questioned him it became

clear that Master Gensoku had only a shallow intellectual understanding. At first Master Gensoku was angry and left Master Hogen, but because of his sincere desire to pursue the truth, Master Gensoku was able to overcome his angry feelings. He returned to Master Hogen and asked the same question that he had asked Master Seiko. Master Hogen answered with the same words that he had found unacceptable earlier. This time Master Gensoku saw the real situation clearly.

The words (lit. *"the child of the elder brother and younger brother of fire comes to get fire"*) were the same in both cases; the difference was in Master Gensoku's attitude. When he first heard Master Seiko's words his attitude had been intellectual and analytical. When he returned to Master Hogen his attitude had become very sincere, very practical and realistic. When he heard Master Hogen's words with this attitude they were able to suggest something real – our sincere effort in this moment.

TWENTY-THREE

One day, when Master Hotetsu of Mount Mayoku was using a fan, a monk asked: *It is said that by its nature air is everywhere and there is no place where there is no air. So why, Master, in spite of this, do you fan yourself?*

The Master said: *You only know that by its nature air is everywhere. However, you have not understood the principle that there is no place where there is no air.*

The monk said: *What is the principle that there is no place where there is no air?*

The Master just fanned himself. The monk prostrated himself in front of the Master.

The Master said: *If a Master does not have any Buddhist ability, even explaining one thousand problems does not make him benevolent.*

Commentary

Master Mayoku Hotetsu criticized the monk's attitude because it was based completely on intellectual thinking. When the monk asked the Master for an explanation, the Master answered, not with intellectual concepts, but with his actual behavior. Seeing the Master's real action the monk was able to leap out of his intellectual viewpoint into reality itself.

Master Hotetsu suggested that we are living in the real world. All things and phenomena in the world should be recognized in a practical or realistic manner. Even though air exists all around us at all times, if we do not use a fan it may not be possible for us to notice its existence. Through our actions we can recognize what reality is. The Master's actions helped the monk to attain this recognition and so the monk prostrated himself before the Master.

TWENTY-FOUR

One day, the two Acaryas, Shin and Myo, arrived at the River Wai. They were watching some men who were pulling in a net, and as they did so, several carp were escaping through holes in the net.

Acarya Shin said: *Look Brother Myo, they are as skillful as Buddhist monks!*

Myo said: *Even though they are, how much better not to be netted in the first place!*

Acarya Shin said: *Brother Myo, the fact is you haven't realized the truth.*

That night, at midnight, Acarya Myo reflected on those words and understood them completely.

Commentary

Acarya is a title that suggests one who is experienced in the practice of Zazen. Acarya Shin esteemed the carp that were able to escape the nets of the fishermen. Acarya Myo agreed but thought it would be even better if they could have managed not to be caught in the net in the first place. Most of us are like this. We hope to avoid future problems and wish the problems we already have would just disappear. Shin criticized this attitude as being unrealistic. Dealing with problems and solving them as best we can is our life. It is the only life we have. Myo's attitude was originally rather too idealistic – Buddhism is much more realistic and practical than that – and finally, through his sincere reflection on Shin's words, he realized the truth.

TWENTY-FIVE

Master Sozan Honjaku asked Acarya Toku: *It is said that the true universal body of the buddhas is like space, and that the way it manifests itself in every thing is like images of the moon reflected in the surface of water. What can we say that will explain the basic principle?*

Acarya Toku said: *It is like an ass looking down a well.*

Master Sozan said: *Although you have stated it very well, you have expressed only eighty or ninety percent.*

Acarya Toku said: *What about you, Master?*

Master Sozan said: *It is like the well looking up at the ass.*

Commentary

Master Sozan explained the relative nature of the relationship between subject and object. We would normally say that an ass looks down into the well, but the principle of relativity in Buddhist theory says that the well also looks up at the ass. That is, the relationship between the well and the ass is always a mutual relationship. On one side is the ass and on the other side is the well. They exist mutually – one in front of the other, an interaction that is not divided into two.

TWENTY-SIX

Layman Kanyu Bunko one day said to Master Daiten Hotsu: *I, your disciple, am very busy with matters concerning the military, and with local government affairs. I would like to ask the Master for a single word that can express the essence of the Teachings.*

Master Daiten stayed silent for a while.

Layman Bunko did not know what he should do. At that time, Master Sampei Gichu was attending on Master Daiten. He struck the floor of the Zazen Hall three times.

Master Daiten said: *What are you doing?*

Master Sampei said: *First move the problem with the balanced state and then pull it out with wisdom.*

Straightaway layman Bunko prostrated himself in thanks to Master Sampei saying: *Your Buddhist attitudes, Masters, are high and steep. I, a disciple, have found a concrete way into the truth near your attendant monk's place.*

Commentary

Layman Kanyu Bunko asked for the essence of Buddhist teachings to be expressed in one word. However, Master Daiten just kept silent. Master Sampei Gichu, who was waiting on Master Daiten saw that the layman was stuck in the situation and so he struck the floor three times to answer in place of the Master.

When his Master asked what he was doing, he explained his action by saying that he had simply acted and that his action had changed the situation. Then he explained to the layman the power of action to change our state. Layman Bunko prostrated himself in thanks to Master Sampei, and then praised Master Daiten because if even his attendant monk could explain the Buddhist truth to him, Master Daiten must surely be a great Master.

TWENTY-SEVEN

Master Monju asked Master Godai Mujaku: *Where have you just come from?*

Master Mujaku said: *From the southern district.*

Master Monju said: *How is Buddhism sustained in the southern district?*

Master Mujaku said: *Buddhist monks in this degenerate age rarely observe the precepts.*

Master Monju said: *How many members are they?*

Master Mujaku said: *Sometimes three hundred, sometimes five hundred.*

Master Mujaku asked Master Monju: *What about Buddhism here, how does it sustain itself?*

Master Monju said: *Ordinary people and saints live together, like dragons and snakes.*

Master Mujaku said: *How many are they?*

Master Monju said: *Three and three in front of us, and three and three behind us.*

Commentary

Two monks were talking about the real situation with regard to Buddhism in their districts very concretely and honestly. They did not exaggerate things, neither did they understate themselves. They said that although there were many Buddhist monks in Southern China, they were not so diligent in maintaining the Buddhist precepts. However, although there were excellent Masters in Northern China, they numbered but a few.

"Three-and-three in front and three-and-three behind" was a very common expression in Buddhism in China, used to illustrate a concrete and particular situation. Here it also suggests "few" in relation to the three or five hundred expressed by Master Mujaku.

TWENTY-EIGHT

One day Master Hyakujo Ekai went to do his work in the fields. A monk was hoeing the ground, when suddenly he heard the sound of the drum. The monk threw down his hoe and, laughing loudly, went straight back to the temple.

The Master said: *He is very quick! His attitude is the same as when Avalokitesvara enters the Dharma gate.*

Arriving at the temple, the Master called the monk at once and asked: *What principle have you just seen, that you acted in such an excellent manner?*

The monk said: *Well, I was starving. So, when I heard the sound of the drum, I just came back to the temple to eat.*

The Master laughed loudly.

Commentary

Master Hyakujo recognized that the behavior of one of his monks had become excellent as he acted quickly without any hesitation, so he asked the monk whether he had recently come to understand some fundamental truth. The monk's answer was very concrete and direct. On hearing the sound of drum, he came back to the temple and ate his meal. This direct and simple answer made the Master happy and so he laughed loudly!

TWENTY-NINE

While Great Master Yakusan Igen was sitting in Zazen, a monk asked:
What are you thinking in the still-still state?

The Master said: *I am thinking of not-thinking.*

The monk said: *How can we think not-thinking.*

The Master said: *It is different from thinking.*

Commentary

Master Yakusan Igen and the monk were discussing the essence of Zazen. Their discussion follows the logic of the four viewpoints; that is, the views based upon idealism, materialism, action, and reality. The monk asked what the master was thinking when he practiced Zazen. The Master answered that he was thinking not-thinking, that is, he denied that he was engaged in deliberate thought. In Zazen, even though we are not deliberately thinking, our consciousness is clear and some thoughts naturally arise. The monk was puzzled and asked a more detailed question: how can you be thinking and not-thinking at the same time? The Master replied that his actual state while sitting in Zazen was different from the thinking state, and different from the not-thinking state. It was another state, that is, the state of simply sitting in reality – the state of just acting.

THIRTY

Master Isan Reiyu asked Master Kyozan Ejaku: *Someone suddenly says to you: "If our mental viewpoint is only produced by our conduct in the past, then there is no stable basis to existence." If things are so inconclusive, how can we find out whether someone has the Buddhist state?*

Master Kyozan Ejaku said: *I, Ejaku, have a way to test them.*

Just then a monk passed in front of them.

Master Kyozan called the monk: *Acarya!*

The monk turned his head.

Master Kyozan said: *Master. This mental viewpoint is only produced by our conduct in the past, and there is no stable basis to our existence. The situation is inconclusive.*

Master Isan said: *This is just a drop of lion's milk that scatters six pints of donkey's milk.*

Commentary

Master Isan Reiyu asked Master Kyozan Ejaku how it was possible to find out whether human beings had the Buddhist state if our mental viewpoint is simply the result of our past conduct. Master Kyozan used a very concrete method. He called out to a monk who was passing nearby. When the monk turned his head, Master Kyozan said that just this concrete act of the monk turning his head when called was a good enough way to find out. If we think about a person's state, we cannot reach a conclusion, but if we look at a person's actions, we can see their state immediately. On hearing this reply, Master Isan agreed with Master Kyozan and he praised his answer saying that his briefness (a drop of lion's milk) put to shame others who were more wordy (scattering six pints of donkey's milk) but less close to the target.

THIRTY-ONE

Master Ankoku Ekyu from the Fuku District, asked Head of the Temple Office Ryo: *Our late Master said, "The whole world in all directions is just the concrete human body." But can you see the Zazen Hall or can't you?*

The Head of the Temple Office said: *Master, don't let flowers cloud your eyes.*

The Master said: *Although our late Master has passed on, his flesh is still warm even today.*

Commentary

Master Ankoku asks a question of the Head of the Temple Office. His question was: If the world in all directions is really the same as our concrete human body, how is it that we can see something as solid as the Zazen Hall over there? The Head of the Temple Office's reply was to warn Master Ankoku not to get lost in intellectual ponderings. This reply hit the target with the Master and he praised the Head of the Temple Office by suggesting that his words contained the essence of their Master's own words; that even though their Master was dead, his teachings were still very much alive.

THIRTY-TWO

Master Hokusui Hon-nin preached to an assembly: *Normally, we should not wish to preach to human beings using voice and words. Why? Because voice is not only voice and form is not only form.*

A monk asked: *What do you mean by voice is not only voice?*

Master Hon-nin said: *Can you represent form by speaking of it? No.*

The monk said: *What do you mean by form is not only form?*

Master Hon-nin said: *Can you represent voice by speaking of it? No.*

The monk had no reply.

Master Hon-nin said: *In short, I have preached for you. If you understand, I will affirm that you have entered the place that should be entered.*

Commentary

Master Hon-nin emphasized that in our Buddhist discussions it is not easy to transmit the truth – so we should avoid teaching Buddhism relying solely on words. That is, reality is more than simply what we can say or what we can see. Words are merely representations and are always open to interpretation by the listener. The words “voice” and “form” (lit. color) are merely words that refer to something; they can never be the sound or that actual object. Of course, words function within the context of language, but verbal explanations can never fully catch reality.

Master Hon-nin’s final admonition suggests that if the monk can understand the meaning, role, and value of language, he would acknowledge that he had understood the Buddhist truth.

THIRTY-THREE

On the road to Mount Tai there lived an old woman. Whenever a monk asked the way by saying, *"Which road should I take to Mount Tai?"*, the old woman would just say, *"Straight ahead."* And after the monk had gone a few yards the old woman would comment, *"Another dignified, but second-rate monk has made the same mistake."* She acted in exactly the same manner to all monks, whether young or old. One such monk told what had happened to him to Master Joshu.

Master Joshu said: *Ah! I will test and defeat the old woman for you.*

Off he went and eventually asked the old woman: *Which is the road to Mount Tai?*

After giving her usual directions, the old woman said: *"Another dignified, but second-rate monk has made the same mistake."*

Master Joshu returned to the Temple and said in his preaching to the community of monks: *I have tested and defeated the old woman for you.*

Commentary

The old woman enjoyed tricking the monks by sending them down the wrong path and then calling them second rate. Master Joshu said that he would defeat the old woman. When he met the old woman she pulled her usual trick, but Master Joshu returned to the monks and proclaimed his victory over the old woman. In what sense had he defeated her? He had allowed her to think that she was tricking him, but her view of the situation was incomplete. When the Master came to her she saw only what she expected to see: another monk that she could fool. Master Joshu had a more complete understanding of the situation, but he had no need to demonstrate his superiority, and perhaps he didn't want to rob the old woman of the pleasure she derived from tricking the monks.

A person who is unknowingly fooled by others cannot be proud of their state. However, a person who accepts knowingly that they are being cheated is beyond those who cheated them.

THIRTY-FOUR

Master Isan asked Master Kyozan Ejaku: *Is it the weather that is cold or is it me that is cold?*

Master Kyozan said: *A great Buddhist Master exists in this place.*

Master Isan said: *Why don't you explain the situation more directly?*

Master Kyozan said: *My words were not so skillful. What would you say, Master?*

Master Isan said: *We should directly follow streams.*

Commentary

Master Isan's question to his disciple about the weather is asking whether the objective or the subjective is more important. Master Kyozan thought his Master's question was too abstract. The real situation is neither subjective nor objective. It is a combination of both. So he suggested, rather politely, that a real Buddhist Master is always in the here and now, and doesn't get tied up in theoretical discussion.

Master Isan felt that the situation could be expressed even more directly. This made Master Kyozan feel a little foolish, and he said so. His Master replied, *"We should directly follow streams."* This suggests that Buddhists should follow the real situation directly and flexibly. Sometimes it is useful to talk philosophically about the relationship between subject and object – sometimes it isn't.

THIRTY-FIVE

Master Joshu said: *I would like to answer questions. If there is anything you have questions about, please ask me.*

A monk walked forward and prostrated himself.

Master Joshu said: *Now you want to get a jewel by throwing away a tile. However, you have drawn out a clay brick that has not even been fired.*

The Master then stepped down from his lecture seat.

Sometime later, Master Hogen told the story to Master Kaku Tetsu-shi (Iron Beak) and asked: *What does this story mean?*

Master Kaku said: *You, Master Hogen, are very excellent, so if I tell you the meaning, it is as if the State prostrates itself before its General. If you ask "Is there anyone who can understand the story?" and if someone replies "I have got it!", I will say to him "Oh no you haven't!"*

Master Hogen said: *I see.*

Commentary

Master Joshu asked his monks to bring their questions to him. A monk came forward and instead of asking a question he just performed a prostration. Master Joshu felt that the monk's behavior was imitative and showed an intellectual attitude – he hadn't really digested the teachings yet, but he wanted to get his master's praise by denying the value of asking questions.

Master Hogen Bun-eki told this story to Master Kaku Tetsu-shi (Master Koko Ekaku) and asked him to explain. Master Kaku said that he thought that Master Hogen was an excellent master and for him to try to explain it would be as out of place as a country prostrating to its General rather than the General prostrating to the country. He added that if there was anyone who said he could explain the story for Master Hogen, he would strongly deny that they could do so. The Buddhist experience of the truth does not involve explanations and is not an intellectual state. Therefore people who insist that they have reached the end of the Buddhist road, show by that insistence itself that they are far from such a state.

THIRTY-SIX

Master Joshu asked Master Tosu Daido: *What is the situation of a man who has experienced the great death and lives again?*

Master Tosu said: *I will not allow such a person to walk around at night. When it has become light in the morning, he can come here.*

Commentary

The words “*to experience the great death and live again,*” which can be found in certain Buddhist literature, sound very dramatic. Master Tosu said that the situation of a person who has had such an experience is just a common everyday fact. It is as common and natural as the fact that the monks don’t wander around at night and when it becomes light they visit the master in his room.

To experience the great death means to enter reality. What is it that dies at such a time? We can say that our attachment to, or identification with, the intellect and the emotions dies during such an experience. After the great death we live in reality – not in the world of thinking or the world of emotion. However, it is also true that we are living in reality all the time, so to die the great death does not mean that we enter some extra-ordinary state, but just that we experience and fully participate in the reality that is always present in ordinary life.

THIRTY-SEVEN

Master Doyo on Mount Ungo asked Master Seppo Gison: *Has the snow outdoors melted or not?*

Master Seppo said: *There is nothing at all. What is there to melt?*

Master Ungo said to himself: *It has melted.*

Commentary

In Buddhist stories snow is sometimes used as a symbol of hindrances. So the question "*Has the snow melted yet?*" is one way to ask if a monk has overcome the hindrances that keep him from realizing the truth.

Master Seppo said that there was nothing to melt, there were no hindrances to overcome. In the ultimate phase of Buddhism, there is only reality.

When he heard Seppo's answer Master Ungo said to himself, "*It has melted.*" This was his affirmation of reality – the snow had melted away.

THIRTY-EIGHT

One day a Buddhist monk asked Master Kyogen Chikan: *What is the one word that transcends sounds and forms?*

Master Kyogen said: *Before I became the Master of Kyogen Temple, you can say that I was at the place called the ineffable.*

The monk said: *In that position, I would not dare to say that such a place exists.*

The Master said: *The situation is like a phantom's mind and what it is perceiving.*

Commentary

A monk asked Master Kyogen to tell him about the area outside of sound and form, that is, outside the area of sense perception. There is an area outside of sense perception – reality also includes value and meaning.

Master Kyogen's reply means that even before he became master of the temple he was already living in the ineffable; he was already, as we all are, living in reality, which includes both the world of sense perception and the area outside of sense perception.

The monk understood what the master was saying and added that he also realized that it is impossible to describe the reality in which we live even with the words "*the place called the ineffable*" because he knew that no words could capture reality. The Master affirmed his denial and presented an image that attempts to suggest the ineffable quality of reality. He used a figure of speech and said that it is as ineffable as the thoughts of a phantom. Reality itself is completely beyond the grasp of words, concepts, and the intellect. Meeting the real world is meeting the state that is beyond sense stimuli.

THIRTY-NINE

Master Kyozan asked Rochu Riku: *I heard that you, Rochu, attained enlightenment by reading Buddhist scriptures. Is this true or not?*

Rochu said: *It is true. When I, your disciple, read the Nirvana Sutra, it said: "Without cutting hindrances, we enter Nirvana."*

The Master held up his *hossu* and said: *How can we "enter" a situation like this?*

Rochu Riku said: *Even the word "enter" is not necessary.*

The Master said: *I do not use the word "enter" for you Rochu.*

Rochu Riku stood up and left immediately.

Commentary

Riku was an official who was reputed to have attained enlightenment through reading sutras. Master Kyozan wanted to test Riku's ability outside the area of intellectual knowledge. So Master Kyozan asked Rochu Riku whether what he had heard was true. Rochu Riku affirmed the fact that when reading the Nirvana Sutra he had become enlightened.

Master Kyozan felt Rochu Riku's explanation was somewhat intellectual. He held up his *hossu* (fly whisk) and asked Riku how it was possible to enter the state of reality, for is not reality all around us at every moment? Rochu Riku replied rather facetiously that even the word "enter" was unnecessary. So Master Kyozan countered that "entering reality" did not apply in Riku's case. Master Kyozan was urging Rochu Riku to realize that he was still caught up in intellectual thought. Rochu Riku did not understand what the Master was trying to tell him and left there in a huff.

FORTY

Master Seppo Gison asked Master Reiun Shigon: *An ancient saint said, "Three and three in front of us and three and three behind us." What do these words mean?*

Master Reiun said: *Fish in the water. Birds in the hills.*

Master Seppo said: *What do those words mean?*

Master Reiun said: *Although birds fly high, we can shoot them. Although the waters are deep, we can catch fish.*

Commentary

The words *"Three in front and three behind"* refer to a story in which a monk was asked about the situation in the southern district of China where he lived. He replied that there were three monks in front of him and three monks behind him. He meant that the monks were practicing Buddhism in their ordinary circumstances. Master Reiun said that the practice of Buddhism by such monks was as concrete and real as fish in the water and birds in the hills.

Master Seppo could not understand these words so Master Reiun added, *"Although birds fly high, we can shoot them. Although the waters are deep we can catch fish."* He wanted to describe the unity of the objective world (fish and birds), and the subjective world (we), through action (fishing and hunting). This unity is the real situation of the world, reality itself.

FORTY-ONE

Master Beiko asked a monk: *Where have you just arrived from?*

The monk said: *From Yakusan.*

The Master said: *How is old Master Yakusan these days.*

The monk said: *He is just like a motionless stone.*

Master Beiko said: *He has become so stable and dignified these days.*

The monk said: *He also said to me that there is nothing that he could convey to enlighten me.*

Master Beiko said: *These situations and words are not only Master Yakusan's; I, Beiko, am the same.*

The monk approached and stood looking at the Master.

Master Beiko said: *Look! Look! Even a motionless stone moves.*

The monk left immediately.

Commentary

Master Keicho Beiko asked a monk who had arrived at his temple recently, "*Where have you come from?*" The monk said that he had come from Mount Yaku, that is, the mountain where Master Yakusan Igen lived. So Master Beiko asked about old Master Yakusan's situation. The monk said that he was just like a motionless stone, suggesting that Master Yakusan just practiced Zazen.

Then the monk mentioned that Master Yakusan said to him there was nothing to teach him to enlighten him. To this, Master Beiko replied that he too was the same as Master Yakusan. However, the monk had misunderstood the words to mean that there was nothing more he needed to learn, whereas in fact they suggested that the monk was not ready to be taught. When the monk approached Master Beiko and stood staring at him, the Master shouted, "*Look! Look! Even the immovable stone moves!*" Master Beiko wanted to suggest that reality is not always so stable – there is a time when we need to move. However, the monk could not understand Master Beiko's intention and left.

FORTY-TWO

One day a monk asked Master Kyozan: *Can the "Dharma body" understand Buddhist preaching or not?*

The Master said: *I cannot explain this. But there may be one who can explain it.*

The monk said: *Where is there such a man who can explain it?*

The Master then pushed out his pillow.

Master Isan Reiyu, hearing this story, said: *My disciple Ejaku has put this matter on the edge of a sword.*

Commentary

A monk asked Master Kyozan Ejaku whether the so-called Dharma body can understand Buddhist preaching or not. In some Buddhist teachings there is a theory of three kinds of Buddhist body: the Dharma body, or essence body, which represents the eternal or universal aspect of our body; the human physical body, which is the result of human behavior in the past; and the concrete body that acts at the moment of the present.

Master Kyozan replied that he could not explain it, indicating that Buddhist teachings cannot be explained with words. He added that there may be something in this world that can show us what Buddhism is teaching. The monk wondered where this person might be. Master Kyozan didn't mean a person; he wanted to convey to the monk that even a simple pillow can show us a part of reality – it is always preaching Buddhist truth. To demonstrate this, he pushed his pillow towards the monk.

Later, Master Kyozan's teacher, Master Isan Reiyu, on hearing this story, said that his disciple had used the blade of a sword to handle this issue. Master Isan Reiyu thought that Master Kyozan's act of pushing out the pillow without saying anything was very exact, but was maybe too direct. For this reason he was slightly critical of so sharp a response.

FORTY-THREE

A monk asked Master Reiun Shigon: *What is the fundamental principle of Gautama Buddha's teachings?*

The Master said: *Donkey business has not finished yet. But horse business has arrived already.*

The monk could not understand the intention of the words, so he said: *I ask you to teach me further.*

The Master said: *The atmosphere is always changing at night, and it is rare to meet a ghost in the day-time.*

Commentary

A monk asked Master Reiun Shigon about the fundamental teachings of Buddhism, but the Master just said, "*Donkey business has not finished yet. But horse business has arrived already.*" In China at that time, donkeys and horses were used for everyday transport, and were part of normal life. Here the phrase is used as a simile for very ordinary situations which occur one after the other in day-to-day life. Master Reiun meant that the fundamental teachings of Buddhism refer to the common situations of our day-to-day life.

However, the monk couldn't grasp what the Master meant and asked him to explain further. The Master replied in a figurative way, that the night is dark, but in the darkness we can sometimes sense the atmosphere more keenly; on the other hand it is rare to meet ghosts in the brightness of the day. These words represent the night time and day time situations in our everyday life, so the story emphasizes the fundamental nature of our day-to-day life – this is reality itself.

FORTY-FOUR

One day, when Master Gensa was serving Master Seppo Gison, two monks passed by under the stairs.

Master Seppo said: *Those two men may be good enough grass to produce seeds.*

Master Gensa said: *I would not say that.*

Master Seppo said: *What would you say?*

Master Gensa said: *They should be struck twenty times with a stick at once.*

Commentary

Master Gensa was talking with Master Seppo when two monks passed by. Master Seppo commented that the two monks were students who would become great masters. Master Gensa criticized Master Seppo's words, because Master Gensa thought that Master Seppo's words were rather abstract. So when he was asked what he would say, he replied that they were ready to be beaten twenty times with a stick! Master Gensa's expression was more concrete and direct – he wanted the monks to continue to undergo their hard training.

FORTY-FIVE

Master Tokuzan said in his preaching: *If we ask a question, we may feel it was a mistake. But if we do not ask, we may feel disturbed.*

Then a monk stepped forward and prostrated himself.

Master Tokuzan struck the monk at once.

The monk said: *Why did you strike me although I haven't uttered a word?*

Master Tokuzan said: *Then what should I do while I wait for you to open your mouth?*

Commentary

Master Tokuzan Senkan explained something that everyone has experienced: when we want to ask a question, we are sometimes in two minds: if we ask we may feel stupid, but if we do not ask anything we may feel frustrated. On hearing this, a monk stepped forward and prostrated himself. The monk wanted to express the fact that to ask and not to ask are both different from action. Therefore he prostrated himself to suggest an attitude that was neither asking nor not asking.

Master Tokuzan felt that the monk had prostrated because it was what he thought he should do, rather than being a wholehearted action, so he struck the monk. The monk then protested that Master Tokuzan struck him even though he hadn't said anything. Master Tokuzan said that if he waited for people to speak he would have nothing to do. He wanted to show the monk that to act wholeheartedly, not from an intellectual basis, was the Buddhist way.

FORTY-SIX

One day, when Master Gensa Shibi took a walk in the mountains with Master Seppo Gison, Master Seppo said: *I would like this spot for my grave.*

Master Gensa said: *Yes – this plot looks just the right place to build a tomb for a monk.*

Then Master Seppo made as if he was calculating the width of the plot.

Master Gensa said: *What you are doing is alright, but I wouldn't do that.*

Master Seppo said: *What would you do?*

Master Gensa said: *I would just build the tomb.*

Master Seppo said: *Good! Good!*

Commentary

While walking in the mountains with Master Gensa, Master Seppo found just the spot for his grave. Since Master Gensa also agreed that it was a suitable spot, he pretended to measure out the ground. Master Gensa commented that, although his actions were acceptable, he himself would act more directly: he would just start building the tomb.

This story has a humorous note and shows the difference between Master Seppo's somewhat intellectual character, and Master Gensa's more practical character. Master Seppo affirmed Master Gensa's direct approach.

FORTY-SEVEN

Master Rinzai Gigen preached to an assembly: *There is a true person who has no rank. He is always going in and out through your face. A beginner who has not experienced this should look carefully. Look!*

Commentary

Master Rinzai's expression, "*There is a true person who has no rank,*" is widely known in Buddhism. It points in the same direction as the concept of *sunyata* or emptiness. Reality exists, empty of, or beyond, the various concepts and discriminations which we impose upon it. So this expression represents a person without any social attributes, and it also suggests a person who has grasped the truth. How can we see this true person? In Buddhism we are training ourselves to be true persons, to recognize "the true person," and we should not confuse the person with their social attributes.

Master Dogen accepted the expression "*true person who has no rank*" as an expression of reality, but he said there is also the "*true person with rank.*" This means that discrimination and concepts are also an aspect of reality. They have their place in the Universe as well. Difficulties arise if we become confused about their real nature.

FORTY-EIGHT

Master Tozan Ryokai became a disciple of Master Ungan Donjo, and asked: *Who can hear the non-emotional preaching the Dharma?*

Master Ungan said: *The non-emotional can hear the non-emotional preaching the Dharma.*

Master Tozan said: *Do you hear this preaching?*

Master Ungan said: *If I listened to it, you could not hear my preaching of the Dharma.*

Master Tozan said: *If that is true, then I will not listen to the Master's preaching.*

Master Ungan said: *You do not listen to even my preaching of the Dharma; how can you listen to the preaching by the non-emotional?*

Then Master Tozan made a poem and presented it to Master Ungan.

The poem said:

*How great and wonderful it is. How great
and wonderful!
The Dharma preaching of the non-emotional
is a mystery.
If we listen to it with ears, we cannot hear it.
If we listen to it through the eyes, then
we can understand.*

Commentary

Master Tozan Ryokai asked about the preaching of the Dharma by non-emotional beings. Non-emotional is originally "*mujo*," which means inanimate or insentient, and often refers to nature. So the preaching by non-emotional beings means the preaching of nature, which was discussed by many Buddhist monks.

However, in *Shobogenzo Mujo-seppo* (*The Non-Emotional Preaches the Dharma*), Master Dogen's understanding of this phrase was wider and included the whole of nature – human beings as well as mountains and rivers and so on. His view was that inanimate things could preach the Dharma, and so could human beings, when they are not emotional.

Answering Master Tozan's questions, Master Ugan said that if he himself were to try to listen to the preaching of the non-emotional, he would be unable to preach the Dharma himself, and therefore he had to keep himself in the state in which he did not listen. To this Master Tozan replied, that he would not listen to his master's teachings so that he himself could listen to the non-emotional preaching. Master Ugan said that we don't actually listen to Dharma preaching in the normal sense – we intuit that preaching.

Finally, Master Tozan presented a poem to Master Ugan. The poem said that this real world is wonderful just as it is, and the preaching of the non-emotional cannot be heard just with the ears. When we listen to it with eyes we can recognize it at once. To listen to a voice with our eyes means to understand something intuitively. So Master Tozan meant that preaching by non-emotional beings or the preaching of nature can be heard intuitively.

FORTY-NINE

One day Master Seppo Gison preached to an assembly: *This looks like a plot of earth. We rely upon people planting seeds, but there is no-one who does not receive the benefit.*

Then Master Gensa said: *What do you mean by a plot of earth?*

Master Seppo said: *Just look at it carefully.*

Master Gensa said: *That's a nice way to put it, but I would not put it like that.*

Master Seppo said: *What would you say?*

Master Gensa said: *Every person has their own individual state.*

Commentary

Master Seppo Gison used a rice paddy in which people plant seeds as a metaphor for Buddhist practice. He said actually everyone receives benefit from the field. Master Gensa asked him to describe the plot more concretely, but Master Seppo just said, *"Just look at it carefully,"* suggesting that it is impossible to explain the plot with words. By this he meant that Master Gensa should study the plot for himself.

However, while affirming Master Seppo's words, Master Gensa said that he would put it differently, that what we see as a plot relies upon each person's state. He insisted that each person has their own state, their own Buddhist state. Here, Master Seppo expressed a general principle, and Master Gensa spoke of more concrete facts, the real situation.

FIFTY

Master Baso Do-itsu of the Kosei district preached to Master Yakusan Igen saying: *Sometimes I make him move his eyebrows and wink his eyes. Sometimes I do not make him move his eyebrows and wink his eyes. Sometimes it is good for me to make him move his eyebrows and wink his eyes. Sometimes it is not good for me to make him move his eyebrows and wink his eyes.*

Suddenly Master Yakusan attained the great truth.

Commentary

Master Baso Do-itsu described real situations in his Buddhist life, referring to his physical self in the third person. Sometimes he behaved actively. Sometimes he behaved himself passively. Sometimes it was good for him to behave actively. Sometimes it was bad for him to behave actively. Buddhist life is like this. Buddhist life is always at the moment of the present.

Sometimes Buddhist behavior is active, sometimes Buddhist behavior is passive. Sometimes active behavior is good. Sometimes active behavior is not good. Master Baso's teachings were very concrete. Hearing those teachings, Master Yakusan saw clearly what reality is.

FIFTY-ONE

Master Keisho of Mount Sekiso preached to Master So-ho Ko: *So-ho Ko, when we doubt, there is something different. When we affirm, there is a gap. Also our understanding should not be based on non-doubt or non-affirmation. There is no way to know reality except by throwing away our knowledge of existence.*

Commentary

Master Sekiso Keisho explained to Master So-ho Ko about doubt and affirmation. Master Keisho stated that neither doubting nor affirming are perfect. Then he insisted that our understanding cannot be relied upon even when we feel we have no doubts or no confidence.

Master Keisho denied the ultimate value of intellectual thinking. Of course, intellectual thought and scientific knowledge have their value and place, but they are only part of our picture of the world. Only by throwing away our attachment to thoughts and ideas can we really “know” reality. In one sense, the most important function of the brain is to help us recognize the existence of reality.

FIFTY-TWO

One day the National Master, Nan-yo Echu, arrived in front of a shrine with Emperor Shukuso. Pointing at a stone image of a lion, the Master said: *Emperor! This stone image of a lion is splendid. Please say a word that will change our situation.*

The Emperor said: *I cannot think of a single thing to say. Please Master, say something.*

The Master said: *It is the fault of this mountain monk.*

Later, Master Tangen Shin-o asked Master Nan-yo Echu: *Did the Emperor understand something at that time?*

The Master said: *I would like to put aside whether the Emperor understood or not. How do you understand the truth?*

Commentary

Pointing at one of the beautiful lion statues, Master Nan-yo Echu asked the Emperor to say a so-called “*turning word*” that is, a word that can change the situation. A word that changes us means a word that makes us realize the truth, or describes the truth. However, the Emperor could not say anything and asked Master Nan-yo to say something instead. Master Nan-yo’s word “*mountain monk*” refers to himself in a deprecating way, because he felt that it was his own fault that the Emperor could not express himself, that he had not taught the Emperor well enough.

Later, Master Shin-o asked Master Nan-yo about the understanding of the Emperor. However, Master Nan-yo replied “*what about you?*” warning Shin-o not to bother worrying about others, but to look at himself. This is the Buddhist attitude. Buddhist training is a matter for ourselves. You may feel that you want to know others’ state, or to compare yourself with others. However, this training is ultimately just for yourself. So the most important point is knowing yourself.

FIFTY-THREE

One day Master Hyakurei met Layman Ho-on on a road. The Master asked: *Those words from which you got your power at Master Nangaku Ejo's – have you preached them to others yet?*

Layman Ho-on said: *Yes I have.*

The Master said: *To whom did you preach them?*

Layman Ho-on, pointing to himself with his hand, said: *Ho-on.*

The Master said: *Even Sariputra and Subhuti do not deserve such excellent praise as you!*

Layman Ho-on then asked the Master in turn: *Who can understand the words from which I got this power?*

The Master immediately put a straw hat on his head and left.

Layman Ho-on said: *Please take care of yourself on the road.*

The Master just left without looking back.

Commentary

Layman Ho-on is called Ho-ko in the text. Ho-on was a secular person, but he studied Buddhism while leading a secular life. It is said that he had a profound understanding of Buddhism. When Master Hyakurei asked him whether he had used the teachings he had received from Master Nangaku, he answered that using those words, he had taught himself. Master Haykurei was impressed with Ho-on's attitude to keep teaching himself, and praised him as more excellent than Sariputra and Subhuti, who were said to be fine students of the Buddha.

Then, Ho-on described the difficulty of teaching Buddhism by asking who could really understand those teachings. Although Ho-on had understood something from the words he had studied, he felt that those words may not always give someone the same understanding that he had. This was the difficulty that Ho-on wanted to express. On hearing this, Master Hyakurei left without saying anything. This suggests that Master Hyakurei was also aware of this difficulty from his experience as a Buddhist. However, the point is not whether someone understands the words or not. It totally depends on the individual's experience and state. Understanding is not given to us by someone; understanding is the result of our own efforts to grasp the truth.

FIFTY-FOUR

One day, Master Nansen Fugan on Mount Nansen in the Chishu district was working on the mountain. A monk passed by and asked the Master: *Which is the way to Mount Nansen?*

The Master held up the sickle and said: *I bought this sickle for cutting grass for thirty pennies.*

The monk said: *I didn't ask you about the sickle that you bought for thirty pennies. Which is the way to Nansen?*

The Master said: *Now I am using the sickle and feel rather comfortable with it.*

Commentary

When Master Nansen Fugan was working on the mountain, he was asked by a monk the way to Mount Nansen. However, the Master didn't answer; he just said that he had bought his sickle for thirty pennies. The monk was very keen to pursue the truth; he had probably journeyed long to find Master Nansen and study with him, and had arrived at his destination without knowing it.

Realizing this, the Master wanted to teach the monk right there and then that the most important matter is to work in day-to-day life. The monk complained that the Master had not answered his question and asked the way again, but the Master again simply answered that he had grown very comfortable with using the sickle. This was his direct teaching to the monk.

FIFTY-FIVE

One day Master Reiun Shigon from the Fuku district arrived at the truth while looking at peach blossoms. He wrote a poem:

*For thirty years I have been a traveler looking for
something sharp like a sword.
Many times have the leaves of autumn fallen,
and the twigs of spring sprouted.
But seeing these peach blossoms,
I have entered this moment of the present directly.
Now I have no more doubts.*

He showed the poem to Master Isan Reiyu. Master Isan said: *A man who enters the truth through objective circumstances will not regress or lose the truth. You should guard and maintain it well.*

Hearing this, Master Gensa Shibi said: *Even though the words hit the target very well, I wonder whether the elder brother has arrived at the ultimate state or not.*

Commentary

Master Reiun Shigon arrived at the truth when he saw the beauty of some peach blossoms. Reading the poem, Master Isan praised his state. Master Reiun had been searching for the truth for many years, but when he saw the bright peach blossoms on the branch he forgot about his intellectual search and found reality itself. When we look at objective things, like nature, we can leave the world of abstract thinking and directly experience reality in front of us.

Although Master Gensa affirmed Master Reiun's words, he wondered about Master Reiun's state. Of course it is impossible to be convinced of someone's state just by reading their words, but this remark is typical of Master Gensa. In the Shinji Shobogenzo, he is often portrayed as rather critical or cynical about other masters' words and opinions.

FIFTY-SIX

Master Chokei Eryo became a disciple of Master Reiun Shigon. Master Eryo asked: *What is the fundamental principle of Gautama Buddha's teachings?*

Master Reiun said: *Before the donkey business has finished, horse business has arrived.*

Master Eryo went back and forth between Master Seppo and Master Gensa for twenty years, but still did not understand this problem. One day he was winding up a bamboo curtain when suddenly he arrived at the truth. Then he made a poem:

*How wonderful! How wonderful!
I wound up the bamboo curtain and looked at
the whole world.
If someone asks me what school I belong to,
I will take up a hossu and strike him just at the
moment he opens his mouth.*

Master Seppo asked Master Gensa: *Has this disciple arrived at the aim or not?*

Master Gensa said: *This is just a description of consciousness. I will test him further to discover his real situation.*

That evening, all the monks came to prostrate to Master Seppo. Master Seppo said to Master Eryo: *That diligent practitioner, Shibi, has not affirmed you yet. If you have truly realized the truth, please preach to these monks.*

Master Eryo composed another poem:

*Among many phenomena I alone manifest my body.
When a man affirms himself then his state
is at ease with reality.
In the past, I pursued something, making many
mistakes on the way.
However, when I think about that matter today,
it melts away easily – like ice in fire.*

Then, looking at Master Gensa, Master Seppo said: *His state can never be just a description of mind.*

Commentary

When Master Chokei Eryo asked Master Reiun Shigon about the fundamental principle of Gautama Buddha's teachings, Master Reiun answered that it is simply *"before the donkey has left, a horse has arrived."* At that time, donkeys and horses were used to transport goods, and so those animals were always coming and going in the cities of China. The fundamental principle of Gautama Buddha's teachings is just one thing happening after another in day-to-day life.

Master Eryo went back and forth, studying with Master Seppo and Master Gensa for twenty years, but he still could not resolve his difficulties. However, one day when he was pulling up a bamboo curtain, he suddenly arrived at the truth. Then he wrote a poem showing that he had realized that the fundamental principle of Gautama Buddha's teachings is not an explanation with words. He said that if someone wanted him to explain the fundamental principle of Gautama Buddha's teachings he would strike him at once.

Hearing this story Master Seppo asked Master Gensa if he thought Master Eryo had arrived at the truth or not. Master Gensa answered that he thought Master Eryo's state was still rather intellectual and that he would investigate the matter further. So that evening when the monks came to pay their respects to their Master, Master Seppo asked Master Eryo to express his state again.

Master Eryo described that he was living alone amidst the miscellaneous phenomena of the Universe, and that he could affirm his own existence. He said that he was at ease with all things and phenomena, and that when he remembered the past, he realized that he had been mistaken in the way that he had been pursuing the truth. However, all his doubts were now resolved. Finally, Master Seppo turned to Master Gensa and affirmed Master Eryo's state as not being intellectual at all, but very realistic.

In this story Master Eryo, Master Reiun, Master Seppo, and Master Gensa discussed the matter of arriving at the truth. To arrive at the truth does not mean to get something – it just means to realize reality itself, and to live fully in this present moment.

FIFTY-SEVEN

Master Sozan Konin arrived at Mount I (the temple of Master Isan Reiyu). He immediately asked Master Isan: *I heard that the Master once said, "Relying on words is to be like wisteria, which relies on another tree." If the tree falls down suddenly, and the wisteria withers, what happens to the words?*

Master Isan laughed loudly.

Master Sozan said: *I have traveled for hundreds of miles to get here by selling cloth. Why is the Master making fun of me?*

Master Isan called his assistant and said: *Get some money to give to this veteran monk.* Then he said to Master Sozan: *In future you may meet a one-eyed dragon that will test and defeat you.*

Later, Master Sozan visited Master Myosho's temple and told him what had happened. Master Myosho said: *I would say that Master Isan's attitude was right from beginning to end. However, the person who met him wasn't able to understand him.*

Master Sozan asked: *If the tree falls down and the wisteria withers, what happens to the words?*

Master Myosho said: *You will make Master Isan laugh again for a second time!*

Hearing those words Master Sozan realized the truth. Then he said: *Master Isan's laughter is as sharp as a sword.*

Commentary

Master Sozan Konin asked the meaning of the expression, *"Relying on words is to be like wisteria, which relies on another tree."* This made Master Isan laugh loudly; he thought that Master Sozan's abstract question was comical. Master Sozan was annoyed at being laughed at, and he complained that after working hard to raise the money to come this far to see him, Master Isan was just playing with him. Master Isan continued with his joke, calling his servant monk and telling him to pay Master Sozan for the cost of his journey. Finally Master Isan suggested that Master Sozan may meet an excellent Master who is like a one-eyed dragon, and who would test Master Sozan and change his outlook.

Master Sozan went to visit Master Myosho Tokken, who supported Master Isan's attitude and said that he had been absolutely right in what he had said. However, he suggested to Master Sozan that he hadn't been able to understand what that great master had said to him. Master Sozan then asked Master Myosho the same question. Master Myosho criticized Master Sozan's intellectual attitude in the same way that Master Isan had.

However, on hearing these words, Master Sozan finally realized the truth of the situation. His intellectual attitude fell away and he met reality face to face. So finally he grasped the meaning of Master Isan's laughter – it had been as sharp as a sword!

FIFTY-EIGHT

One day a monk asked Master Unmon: *What is the state of many molecules?*

The Master said: *Rice in a bowl. Water in a bucket.*

Commentary

A monk asked Master Unmon about the state in Zazen that is described as “*jin jin zanmai*.” “*Jin*” means a particle, dust, or molecule, and “*jin jin*” suggests many molecules, that is, concrete things and phenomena or things as they are. So the monk’s question can be interpreted as meaning, “*What is the real state in Zazen?*”

The monk’s question is rather abstract, and yet he is perhaps doubting his abstract idea by asking the question. The Master simply replied, “*Rice in a bowl; water in a bucket.*” Master Unmon said that Zazen is just sitting in the natural state; just like rice sitting in its bowl, or water sitting in its bucket. In Zazen we sit simply in our place in the Universe.

FIFTY-NINE

National Master Daisho, that is, Master Nan-yo Echu of Seikyo, was asked one day by Emperor Shukuso: *What are the ten excellent bodies of Gautama Buddha?*

The Master stood up at once and said: *Have you understood?*

The Emperor said: *I haven't understood.*

The Master said: *Please bring me a pot of clean water.*

Commentary

Emperor Shukuso asked Master Nan-yo Echu about the ten excellent bodies manifested by Gautama Buddha – a teaching that is sometimes interpreted as a set of supernatural bodies. Master Nan-yo Echu didn't say anything – he just stood up. And then he asked whether the Emperor had understood him. The Master's behavior showed that his standing posture is just one of Gautama Buddha's ten bodies – in other words, Master Nan-yo Echu had the self-confidence that he was a buddha. Thus, by simply standing up, he suggested that all our postures can be seen as the body of Gautama Buddha.

However, the Emperor could not understand Master Nan-yo Echu's intention and frankly admitted this to the Master. So the Master asked the Emperor to bring him a pot of clean water. Here again, the Master's words suggest that Gautama Buddha's ten excellent bodies refer to the actual conduct of a Buddhist. Everyday behavior, or action, such as bringing a pot of clean water to the old Master is to manifest the ten bodies of Gautama Buddha. The character or body of Gautama Buddha is just sincere Buddhist conduct.

SIXTY

Master Tosu Daido was asked one day by a monk: *Prince Natta returned the benevolence of his father by breaking his bones and returned the benevolence of his mother by tearing his flesh. How can we understand what is Prince Natta's original body?*

The Master threw down the staff that he was holding.

Commentary

A monk asked Master Tosu Daido about Prince Natta (*Nalakurara* in Sanskrit). The story tells of Prince Natta returning the benevolence of his father and mother by enduring extreme hardships – so hard that his physical body was ruined. The monk asked about the Prince's original body. The story about Prince Natta also suggests abandoning attachment to things – even what we are usually most attached to – our bodies. When we are not over-attached to things, we can become truly ourselves.

To this question, however, Master Tosu just threw down the ceremonial staff that he was holding. The meaning of the Master's behavior is that our life is always just our conduct at the moment of the present. Life is just action, for example, throwing down the stick in our hands. By demonstrating this fact the Master insisted that even the life of Prince Natta was just like that.

SIXTY-ONE

Quoting:

When the practitioner Seki Shitsu, saw a monk coming towards him, he took up his staff and said: *Buddhas in the past were like this. Buddhas of the present are like this. Buddhas in the future will also be like this.*

Commentary

Practitioner Seki Shitsu insisted that buddhas of the past, buddhas of the present, and buddhas of the future, are all something ineffable, which we can call reality itself. Other than reality there are no buddhas in the past, present or future. He suggested that the actions of the monk walking towards him, and of him picking up his staff, just represent the buddhas of the three times; real people carrying out real everyday actions.

SIXTY-TWO

Master Unmon said to the assembly: *Say a true word based on the hundreds of miscellaneous things in the world.*

No-one in the assembly had an answer.

Then Master Unmon himself spoke up for the assembly: *Both!*

Commentary

Master Unmon's question can be divided into two parts: one is to demonstrate a word that represents the truth. The other is the matter of things and phenomena – literally, *"hundreds of grasses on the head."* However, the monks he was preaching to could not answer. Master Unmon answered for the assembly.

"Both" here suggests a word that represents the truth and the multitudinous phenomena often mentioned in Buddhism. The word and miscellaneous things are combined into one reality. Master Unmon simply said, *"Both"* to demonstrate this understanding.

SIXTY-THREE

One day Master Gensa Shibi went for a walk on the mountain following Master Seppo. At that time Master Seppo said: *I would like to make this piece of land into a place where I could live forever.*

Master Gensa said: *Looking at this piece of land, it seems like just the place to build a tomb for a monk.*

Then Master Seppo pretended to measure the height of a monk's tomb.

Master Gensa said: *Your behavior is very amusing, but my opinion is not like that.*

Master Seppo said: *How about you?*

Master Gensa said: *I would just build the tomb.*

Master Seppo said: *Very nice. Very nice.*

Commentary

Master Gensa and Master Seppo were taking a peaceful stroll on the mountain. Master Seppo found a place that he thought was just right to build his own tomb, and Master Gensa agreed. Then Master Seppo started to measure the height of his tomb. Master Gensa did not completely affirm Master Seppo's behavior.

Master Seppo then asked Master Gensa what he would do, and Master Gensa said that he would simply build the tomb. Hearing such concrete and direct words, Master Seppo felt very happy.

SIXTY-FOUR

In Master Rinzai's order there were two students who studied Buddhism together. One asked the other: *Please say a word that transcends the two factors of middle and low.*

The monk said: *When I ask something, I lose my own position.*

The other monk said: *If you are like that, I would like to prostrate in front of you.*

The monk replied: *You rascal!*

Hearing this story, Master Rinzai went immediately to the Lecture Hall and said: *If you want to understand my teachings on the relationship between subject and object (literally, host and guest) please ask these two Buddhist students.*

Commentary

Two monks under Master Rinzai were discussing Buddhism and one asked the other to preach to him. The monk replied that when he wanted to ask something, he felt that he lost his own position, or his Buddhist state. In the Rinzai sect, silence was often revered because it is true that reality cannot be totally explained with words, and sometimes our inquiring or overly intellectual attitude can make us lose the Buddhist state. These words struck the other monk, who said that he wanted to prostrate to his friend. But the other student also revered his friend, so he said, "*You rascal!*" – ironically praising his friend.

Overhearing this talk between the two students, Master Rinzai thought it an excellent Buddhist discussion and he praised the two students. He proclaimed in the Lecture Hall that if the monks wanted to understand the relationship between subject and object – which Master Rinzai often discussed with his students – they should ask these two students in his order.

Master Dogen knew the value of both sides of the argument – the silence, in the practice of Zazen, and discussion, indeed he encouraged his students to ask questions without hesitation. In Buddhism we revere action and reality itself, but we also revere the study of Buddhist teachings, through which we can clarify our understanding of reality and explain Buddhism to others.

SIXTY-FIVE

When Gautama Buddha was dying, Manjusri asked him to preach again.

Gautama Buddha scolded him, saying: *For forty-nine years I haven't preached even one word. Even though you ask me to preach again, have I ever preached a Buddhist sermon in the past?*

Commentary

Manjusri asked Gautama Buddha, who was then dying, to give his Buddhist preaching. Gautama Buddha scolded him and said that had never preached even one word for forty-nine years, which suggests Gautama Buddha's life after his realization of the truth. Gautama Buddha's intention here is that it is impossible for us to completely explain Buddhism with words.

Even though Manjusri asked Gautama Buddha for his Buddhist teachings, Gautama Buddha protested and questioned whether he had really ever preached Buddhism. This story suggests that although philosophical study is useful, essential even, when teaching the meaning of Buddhism, reality can never be fully described with words – it is ineffable.

SIXTY-SIX

One day a monk asked Master Unmon: *When life and death arrive, how can we avoid them?*

The Master said: *Where are they?*

Commentary

A monk asked how to avoid life and death. Master Unmon just asked in return, "*Where are they?*" His words suggest that in reality there is nothing that can be called *life and death* – they are only concepts that we use as a means to talk about our situation. And at the same time, these words indicate that we are living in a situation that is actually ineffable. Because the word *where* is sometimes used to suggest the place where the ineffable is – this place at this moment. Master Unmon means that there is nothing that can be called life and death outside of the reality of our lives.

SIXTY-SEVEN

When Master Rinzai was dying, he was visited by his student, Sansho.

Master Rinzai said: *After my death, please don't destroy my true Dharma eye treasury.*

Sansho said: *How could I dare to destroy the Master's true Dharma eye treasury?*

Master Rinzai said: *If suddenly someone appears and asks you a question, how would you reply to them?*

Sansho immediately shouted: *Katsu!*

Master Rinzai said: *Who would have thought that my true Dharma eye treasury would be destroyed by this blind donkey!*

Commentary

Master Rinzai asked his disciple Sansho Enen not to destroy his “*true Dharma eye treasury*,” meaning, the essence of his Buddhist teachings, after his death. Sansho affirmed confidently that he would never destroy his Master’s Buddhism. However, when he was asked by Master Rinzai how he would maintain the Master’s Buddhism, Sansho only gave a cry of *Katsu!*, perhaps imitating one of Master Rinzai’s favorite methods. Master Rinzai was disappointed with Sansho’s behavior, lamenting that Sansho was nothing but a blind donkey who would surely allow the Master’s Buddhism to perish.

It is interesting to note, however, that in *Shobogenzo Butsido (The Buddhist Truth)*, Master Dogen interpreted “blind donkey” not as a critical expression, but as an ironical expression of Master Rinzai’s praise for his student.

SIXTY-EIGHT

Master Isan Reiyu asked Master Kyozan Ejaku: *How do you understand the fine, pure, bright, mind?*

Master Kyozan said: *Mountains, rivers, and the earth; the sun, the moon, and the stars.*

Master Isan said: *You have only got "that."*

Master Kyozan said: *Master, what did you just ask me about?*

Master Isan said: *The fine, pure, bright, mind.*

Master Kyozan said: *Can we call it "this"?*

Master Isan said: *So it is. So it is.*

Commentary

Master Isan asked his disciple, Kyozan Ejaku, about the fine, pure, bright, mind. The fine, pure, bright state of mind is a description of the Buddhist state, but Master Kyozan replied that it was mountains, rivers, earth, and the sun, moon and stars. Master Kyozan's answer indicates that from the Buddhist viewpoint, subject and object are one. Therefore in the Buddhist state, mind is one with the external world, represented here by mountains, rivers, and so on.

Master Isan was a little critical because he thought Master Kyozan was rather conceptualizing reality by naming individual objective things. So Master Kyozan asked his Master to repeat the question. Master Isan replied, *"The fine, pure, bright, mind."* Master Kyozan then understood Master Isan's point, that according to Buddhism, mind – the subject – and mountains, rivers, earth, sun, moon, stars – the object – are one; they are inseparable. Master Kyozan's answer suggested that perhaps we can only say of the wholeness of reality, *"It is this"*; it is reality here and now. Upon hearing his reply, Master Isan affirmed Master Kyozan's understanding.

SIXTY-NINE

The second Patriarch, Master Ananda, asked Master Mahakasyapa:
Reverend brother student, what kind of concrete thing have you received that is different from Gautama Buddha's golden robe?

Master Mahakasyapa called and said: *Ananda.*

Ananda answered him.

Master Mahakasyapa said: *Please take down the flagpole in front of the temple.*

Commentary

Master Ananda asked what had been transmitted by Gautama Buddha that was different from the Buddha's golden robe. Master Mahakasyapa simply called Ananda, who must have replied *Yes?* Master Mahakasyapa's calling and Master Ananda's answering are just a typical conversation in the daily life of human beings.

The intention of Master Mahakasyapa was that what he had received from Gautama Buddha was just the natural behavior of day-to-day life. And to further emphasize this, Master Mahakasyapa asked Master Ananda to take down the pole in front of the temple, perhaps simply a job that was waiting to be done.

SEVENTY

One day a non-Buddhist asked Gautama Buddha: *I do not ask for words. I do not ask for no words.*

Gautama Buddha just continued to sit.

The non-Buddhist praised him saying: *The great benevolence and great compassion of Gautama Buddha have opened the clouds of my ignorance and enabled me to enter the truth.* Then he prostrated himself and left.

Then Master Ananda said to Gautama Buddha: *What kind of truth did the non-Buddhist realize when he praised you?*

Gautama Buddha said: *It is like a fine horse that runs when it sees only the shadow of the whip.*

Commentary

A non-Buddhist asked Gautama Buddha for neither words nor no words, perhaps indicating his wish to know the ultimate teaching of Buddhism. Understanding the import of the non-Buddhist's question, Gautama Buddha sat in his seat in the posture of Zazen. Gautama Buddha's behavior demonstrated the truth itself in the practice of Zazen. The non-Buddhist understood Gautama Buddha's action and praised the Buddha's benevolence and compassion for clearing away his deluded ideas and enabling him to grasp the truth. After that he simply prostrated himself and left.

Master Ananda could not understand the situation, so he asked Gautama Buddha about what had happened. Gautama Buddha then likened the non-Buddhist's response to that of an excellent horse that runs at seeing only the shadow of the rider's whip. This story gives an example of teaching the truth, not relying on words, but through the action of Zazen.

SEVENTY-ONE

Great Master Hogen of Seiryō-in Temple in Shōshū province, once experienced a profound realization, and abandoning the many jobs in the temple, took his community traveling beyond the lake district where they lived. They had not gone far when they met with a heavy shower of rain. The river began to flood violently and so they took shelter at Jizō-in Temple in the west of the city. There they met old Master Rakan Keichin. Master Keichin asked them: *Acaryas, where are you going?*

Master Hogen said: *Oh, we are traveling here and there.*

Master Keichin said: *How is the traveling?*

Master Hogen said: *I don't know.*

Master Keichin said: *Not to know is just the most direct and familiar.*

Master Hogen then clearly arrived at the truth.

Commentary

Master Hogen Bun-eki, in the course of his Buddhist practice, experienced something profound. So he abandoned all his trivial jobs and took his community of monks traveling. They stayed at Jizō Temple where they met Master Rakan Keichin. Master Keichin chatted to Master Hogen and inquired how everything was going. Master Hogen could only reply, *"I don't know."*

Such discussions represent our real life. Even though Master Hogen was traveling with his students here and there, he could not recognize his aim. This situation in which a person does not clearly know their true aim is the real situation of Buddhist life. This is the meaning of Master Keichin's reply; not knowing is often nearest to the truth of things. On hearing these words, which suggest that intellectual recognition sometimes misses reality, Master Hogen realized the true situation.

SEVENTY-TWO

A monk asked Master Tozan Ryokai: *Just what is Buddha?*

Master Tozan said: *Three pounds of flax.*

At this, the monk realized the truth and prostrated himself.

Commentary

The monk asked about Buddha, but Master Tozan replied by describing a measure of flax. The monk's question seems to suggest that he believes Buddha to be different from concrete things in our day-to-day life, and so Master Tozan showed one example of Buddha, that is, three pounds of flax. The monk grasped the meaning of the Master's words, so he prostrated himself in gratitude.

From this story we can recognize that there is no Buddha that is different from concrete things in our daily life. In other words, Buddhist teachings describe the synthesis of our mind/body (subject) and concrete things (object), into a single, indivisible whole that we call "reality."

SEVENTY-THREE

One day Emperor Kenso of the Tan Dynasty received the bones of Gautama Buddha at the royal court and served them offerings. At night they emanated a bright light.

Early the next morning the Emperor spoke to one of his officers, Kanyu Bunko: *Many ministers and officers all offered me their congratulations and said that this occurrence stemmed from the Emperor's sacred virtue and blessings. Why, Bunko, did you alone not offer me any congratulations?*

Bunko answered the Emperor: *I, a mere officer, have read many Buddhist books and they say that the Buddhist light is different from blue, yellow, red, white, and so forth. So this may just be just be the light of some dragon god.*

The Emperor asked: *So what is the Buddhist light?*

Bunko did not reply, and he was driven away because of his so-called crime.

Commentary

Many religions revere so-called mystical events, but in Buddhism we do not affirm such facts. In this story, Kanyu Bunko, an officer of the Emperor, expressed this opinion to the Emperor.

In this story, when the bones of Gautama Buddha illuminated the royal court at night, many ministers and officers expressed their congratulations to the Emperor. This phenomenon was probably the result of glowing phosphorus in the bones. When the Emperor asked Kanyu Bunko why he did not offer his praise, Bunko ironically replied that the light may be produced by a dragon god, suggesting that the light was certainly not some form of "Buddhist light."

When the Emperor asked him what was Buddhist light, Bunko made no reply. His intention was that silence represents the Buddhist light, but the Emperor could not understand this, and banished Bunko for his so-called crime. From his actions it is clear that Emperor Kenso could not understand the true meaning of Buddhism.

SEVENTY-FOUR

One day Gautama Buddha instructed Master Ananda: *It will soon be time for the meal. You should go to the city, and take the bowl.*

Master Ananda agreed with Gautama Buddha.

Gautama Buddha said: *When you take the bowl you should rely upon the behavior of the Seven Buddhas of the past.*

Master Ananda asked: *What is the behavior of the Seven Buddhas of the past?*

Gautama Buddha called: *Ananda!*

Ananda replied: *Yes?*

Gautama Buddha said: *Take the bowl at once.*

Commentary

When the time for the meal arrived, Gautama Buddha instructed Master Ananda to go to the city to get food. To take the Buddhist bowl means to go to beg for food, as was customary at that time. Gautama Buddha told Ananda that when he collected food he should follow the behavior of the Seven (legendary) Buddhas of the past.

Ananda, not understanding the meaning of the Seven Buddhas of the past, questioned the Buddha. So Gautama Buddha called out to Ananda, who naturally replied, "Yes?" This part of the conversation shows that the behavior of the Seven Buddhas is just the behavior of day-to-day life – for example, when someone calls another, the other replies, "Yes?" The behavior of the Seven Buddhas suggests balanced ordinary behavior in our daily lives. Gautama Buddha suggested this and then indicated that Ananda should carry on with his ordinary daily life by taking the bowl and collecting food for the meal.

SEVENTY-FIVE

One day Master Zengen was practicing Zazen behind a paper blind, when a monk arrived to see him. Opening the curtain, the monk said: *I cannot understand.*

Master Zengen turned his eyes to the monk, waited for a while, and then said: *Now do you understand?*

The monk replied: *I don't understand.*

Master Zengen said: *This is a fact before the Seven Buddhas, how can you not understand it?*

Commentary

Master Zengen Chuko was practicing Zazen behind a paper screen. A monk came to visit him and said that he could not understand why the Master was practicing Zazen behind the curtain. Master Zengen continued sitting in Zazen and then asked the monk if he understood now. When the monk replied again that he could not understand, Master Zengen asked him how he could not understand the fact that Zazen is the one true Buddhist practice since before even the time of the seven legendary Buddhas.

SEVENTY-SIX

Master Seppo said: *There are many people who starve sitting beside a basket of cooked rice. And there are many people who die from lack of water while sitting by the side of the ocean.*

Master Gensa said: *There are many people who die of hunger putting their heads into a basket of rice, and there are many people who die from lack of water putting their heads into the ocean.*

Master Unmon said: *The whole body is just rice. The whole body is just water.*

Commentary

Master Seppo Gison said that even though most of us are living where there is a plentiful supply of food and water, there are some people who act as though they are starving, as though they had nothing. In other words, their greed is so strong that it colors their whole attitude to life, and some even die in this situation.

Master Gensa Shibi added that there are many people who die of hunger even when putting their heads into a basket of cooked rice, and many who die of thirst putting their heads into water. This is another example of such extreme behavior. Sitting beside the rice might also suggest a person who is coolly looking at a confused situation from the outside, while putting one's head into the basket suggests a person who mingles himself into the real confusions of daily life in his or her sincere activity.

Master Unmon Bun-en's words suggest that our whole body is just life itself. So although the three Masters' expressions are different, their words suggest the real situations that we meet in our life.

SEVENTY-SEVEN

A Head Monk called Shisho arrived at Master Hogen's temple and asked: *From whom did you succeed the Zazen Hall that you have opened?*

Master Hogen said: *From Master Jizo.*

The Head Monk then said: *There are many monks who are relying upon the late Master Chokei.*

Master Hogen said: *Actually, I could not understand his stories.*

The Head Monk said: *Why didn't you ask the Master further?*

Master Hogen said: *There is a saying that there is a lone naked body amidst ten thousand miscellaneous phenomena. What does it mean?*

The Head Monk stood up his *hossu*.

Master Hogen said: *Such behavior is only what you learned in the temple of Master Chokei. But what can you say for yourself, Head Monk?*

The Head Monk could not say anything.

Master Hogen said: *Words like "a lone naked body in ten thousand phenomena," do they negate the ten thousand phenomena or do they not negate the ten thousand phenomena?*

Shisho said: *They do not negate them.*

Master Hogen said: *Two factors, both.*

Several monks who were standing close by all agreed: *They negate the ten thousand phenomena.*

Master Hogen said: *A lone naked body in the ten thousand phenomena is just ten thousand phenomena.*

Commentary

A senior monk called Shisho visited Master Hogen Bun-eki and asked him who was his master. So Master Hogen replied Master Jizo, that is, Master Rakan Keichin. The Head Monk said there were many monks who now relied upon Master Chokei Eryo. Master Hogen expressed honestly that he couldn't understand Master Eryo's teachings. Then Master Hogen asked the meaning of the

expression, "*A lone naked body amidst ten thousand phenomena.*" These words express the real situation of human beings – from one aspect, we are each a lone individual in the middle of the vast phenomenal world.

The Head Monk's reply was to stand his ceremonial fly whisk straight up. Master Hogen did not affirm the monk's behavior, saying that such behavior was only imitating what the monk had seen in the temple of Master Chokei Eryo – it was not his own statement. When the Head Monk could not give another answer, Master Hogen asked whether or not the lone naked body negates the ten thousand phenomena. Although the Head Monk replied that it does not negate them, Master Hogen said, "*Both,*" insisting that the Buddhist world is always seen as the oneness of subject and object.

Then some other monks entered the conversation, saying that the lone naked body negates the ten thousand phenomena. This demonstrates the idealistic state of some Buddhist monks – when they hear the words, "*lone naked body in ten thousand phenomena,*" they think that such a spiritual idea can deny the physical world. Master Hogen's idea was different, and he made his final remark – that the lone naked body is not only in the world of phenomena but is the world itself.

We might think idealistically that excellent Buddhist practitioners can transcend their circumstances. According to Buddhist principles, Buddhist practitioners should just behave appropriately, and at the same time, harmonize themselves with their circumstances.

SEVENTY-EIGHT

Master Rinzai visited Master Obaku on the day of Han-Ge (eleven days after the summer solstice – usually around July 12) and bowed down with his hands together. Looking at Master Obaku reading sutras, Master Rinzai said: *I thought that you were just a concrete person. However, you are only an old Master who eats letters like black beans.*

After staying for several days, Master Rinzai prepared to leave.

Master Obaku said: *You came here violating the term of the summer retreat, and now you are leaving without finishing it.*

Master Rinzai said: *I came here only to prostrate myself in front of the Master for a while.*

Master Obaku struck him a blow and drove him out.

After Master Rinzai had traveled several miles a feeling of doubt arose in him and he returned back to Master Obaku and completed the summer retreat.

Commentary

Master Rinzai came to visit Master Obaku, after the summer retreat had already begun. Master Obaku was sitting reading sutras and Master Rinzai criticized him for this, thinking that to read Buddhist scriptures was not a true Buddhist practice. So he stayed in the temple for only a few days and then prepared to leave. Master Obaku criticized Master Rinzai for arriving after the summer retreat had already started and then leaving before the end. Then, having been beaten by Master Obaku, Master Rinzai left. After only traveling a short distance, some doubt arose in him and he realized that Master Obaku's teachings were indeed profound. Then he returned to the temple and stayed for the retreat.

This story demonstrates Master Rinzai's rather peculiar and rude manner. At the same time, he had the sincerity and ability to think about the profound meaning of Master Obaku's behavior. So even though he left the temple once, he came back to the temple again to finish the summer retreat with Master Obaku.

SEVENTY-NINE

When Master Ungai Shian was in the order of Master Sekiso, a monk asked Master Sekiso: *When all houses close their doors, how do we behave ourselves?*

Master Sekiso said: *What about the situation in the Zazen Hall?*

Six months passed before the monk could make a reply. He said: *There is no-one who will accept him.*

Master Sekiso said: *Your reply is very nice but you have only said eighty or ninety percent.*

Hearing this, Master Ungai prostrated himself in front of Master Sekiso to request Master Sekiso to say something, but Master Sekiso would not say anything.

Then Master Ungai grabbed hold of Master Sekiso, made the Master leave his private room, and forced him to sit outside. Then he said: *If the Master won't say anything, I will have to strike him.*

Master Sekiso said: *I have found the words.*

Then Master Ungai prostrated himself many times without stopping.

Master Sekiso said: *There is no-one who is aware of him.*

When he heard these words, Master Ungai experienced a reflection of the truth.

Commentary

A monk asked Master Sekiso, when all houses are closed, what should we do? This question means that if circumstances, that is, the external world, are aggressive towards us, what should we do? Master Sekiso replied by asking about the situation in the Zazen Hall? When we think about our state in the Zazen Hall – in other words, when we practice Zazen – there is nothing to worry about. Therefore even if all houses close their doors to us, it does not matter.

The monk could not understand the Master's words, but after half a year, he found a good expression to represent the situation. He said that there is no-one who accepts him. "To accept" suggests to teach, and "him" suggests the monk

himself. The monk recognized the situation that he is alone in the Universe. On hearing this, Master Sekiso affirmed his words but suggested that the monk had not expressed the whole of the situation.

Master Ungai then urged Master Sekiso to teach him and he prostrated in front of the Master. Master Sekiso wouldn't say anything – he wanted the monk to get his own answer. Then the frustrated monk forced the Master from his room and threatened to strike him.

Finally Master Sekiso expressed his idea, which was much more severe than that of Master Ungai, saying that there is no-one who is even aware of him. Master Sekiso's words represent the situation that everyone is alone in the Universe, and cannot actually be recognized by anyone. On hearing those words Master Ungai got some kind of reflection; that is, he experienced reality directly.

EIGHTY

Master Zuigan Shigen asked Master Ganto Zenkatsu: *What is the eternal principle?*

Master Ganto said: *It has already moved.*

Master Zuigan said: *How is it when it moves?*

Master Ganto said: *We cannot look at the eternal principle.*

Master Zuigan considered this for a while.

Master Ganto said: *If you affirm my words, then you haven't stopped distinguishing between the sense organs and sense stimuli (lit. roots and dust). If you don't affirm them you will sink into life and death forever.*

Commentary

Master Zuigan asked Master Ganto about a principle that could be deemed to be eternal. Master Ganto said that just at the very moment when Master Zuigan asks such a question, the eternal principle has already moved on, meaning that reality is different from any such abstract principle. So Master Zuigan asked another abstract question, when the situation moves, what happens to the eternal principle. Master Ganto said, in our everyday reality, we cannot notice any eternal principle. Master Zuigan thought about these words for a while.

Master Ganto wanted to explain reality further and to anticipate any further philosophizing by the other Master. So he continued that if Master Zuigan affirmed what he'd said, then Master Zuigan hadn't become free from the distinction between the subjective (sense-organs), and the objective (external stimuli). However, if Master Zuigan didn't affirm his words he couldn't transcend life and death in his day-to-day life. So Master Ganto's final words suggest that any such eternal principle is just reality itself: it can't be affirmed and can't be negated.

EIGHTY-ONE

Quoting:

One day, in the order of Master Nansen Fugan, the head monks of the two dormitories fought against each other because of a kitten. Looking at their quarreling, the Master held up the kitten, and said: *If you can say a word of the truth I will not cut the kitten in half.*

The monks did not answer.

The Master cut the kitten into two.

Later Master Nansen reported this story, and asked Master Joshu's opinion. Master Joshu took off his straw sandals and, placing them upon his head, walked out.

Commentary

The two head monks of the east and west dormitories quarreled with each other over who owned a kitten. Master Nansen interrupted them and demanded that if they could represent the truth with words he would spare the cat. The monks did not answer and so the Master cut the kitten in two. Later the Master preached the story in his lecture, and asked the opinion of Master Joshu, who only put his straw sandals on his head and went out. This behavior was his concrete illustration of what he saw as a contradiction.

Master Nansen violated the precept not to kill, in order to teach something to the Buddhist monks. Such behavior was completely wrong, because to observe the Buddhist precepts is the most important matter for a Buddhist monk. However, the Master violated the Buddhist precepts in order to teach his disciples. Walking out with his sandals on his head was Master Joshu's way of demonstrating this contradiction at the heart of Master Nansen's teachings.

EIGHTY-TWO

One day Master Hyakujo went with Master Baso Do-itsu for a walk. As they walked along they saw a group of wild ducks flying in the sky.

Master Baso said: *What are they?*

Master Hyakujo said: *Wild ducks.*

Master Baso said: *Where are they going?*

Master Hyakujo said: *They have flown away.*

Master Baso grasped Master Hyakujo's nose and twisted it. Master Hyakujo could not tolerate the pain and cried out: *Aagh! Aagh!*

Master Baso said: *Although you said they have flown away, you are always at this place.*

Master Hyakujo immediately broke out in a sweat, and just then he experienced a reflection of the truth.

The next day Master Hyakujo attended an informal teaching given by Master Baso, where a few monks had gathered. Master Hyakujo stepped forward, rolled up Master Baso's prostration mat and put it away.

Master Baso got down from the lecture seat and went back to his personal room, followed by Master Hyakujo. He then asked Master Hyakujo: *I went to the Lecture Hall, but why did you put away the prostration mat before I had preached anything?*

Master Hyakujo said: *Yesterday I was caught by the tip of my nose by the Master and it was very painful.*

Master Baso said: *Yesterday, where did you concentrate your mind?*

Master Hyakujo said: *Today the tip of my nose is not painful any more.*

Master Baso said: *Now you know the profound matter of this very moment.*

Then Master Hyakujo prostrated himself and went out.

Commentary

Master Hyakujo Ekai was out walking with his Master, Baso Do-itsu, when a flock of wild ducks flew overhead. Master Baso asked what they were, and Master Hyakujo answered that they were wild ducks. Master Baso asked where they were going, and Master Hyakujo replied that they had already flown away. Although this was the fact, his answer sounded somewhat arrogant, so Master Baso twisted the tip of his student's nose, causing him to cry out in pain. Master Baso pointed out that although the ducks had flown away, Master Hyakujo was just at this place. Hearing those words, Master Hyakujo realized the true situation.

Next day, Master Hyakujo went to Master Baso's informal preaching but before the lecture began, he put away the Master's prostration mat so that Master Baso couldn't prostrate himself in front of the Buddha image – the usual custom before a lecture. Master Baso returned to his private room where he asked Master Hyakujo why he had behaved like that. Master Hyakujo did not answer his Master's question, because his mind was still focused upon the previous day, when his nose had been tweaked. Remembering the event, he said that it had been very painful. Master Baso wanted to point out that Master Hyakujo's mind was concentrated on a past event today, just as it had been yesterday.

Master Hyakujo noticed the meaning in his Master's words, and replied from his present state, that the tip of his nose no longer hurt. Hearing these words, Master Baso recognized that Master Hyakujo had grasped the truth, that his consciousness was always in the present, and he affirmed this to Master Hyakujo.

This story shows how these two masters studied the concrete situation here and now. And this attitude – to focus on the concrete reality in front of us – is the Buddhist attitude.

EIGHTY-THREE

Near Mount Seppo there was a monk who lived in a hut that he had built. For many years this monk had not shaved his head. He made a wooden dipper for himself and would go to the side of a river, scoop the water into the dipper, and drink.

One day a monk visited him and asked: *What was Master Bodhidharma's intention in coming from India?*

The master of the hut said: *The ravine is deep, so the handle of this dipper is long.*

The monk went back to the temple and told Master Seppo of his experience.

Master Seppo said: *Wondrous! I will go there myself and see the real situation of the old Master. I will know at once if he is genuine.*

So one day Master Seppo, taking a razor, went to the hut with his servant monk, to visit the old man. They looked at each other for a while, then Master Seppo said: *If you can say anything about the truth, I will not shave your head.*

The master of the hut immediately washed his head with water. Then Master Seppo shaved his head for him.

Commentary

The monk in the story lived near Mount Seppo, where Master Seppo Gison had his temple. Although this monk had not shaved his head for a long time, his life was very natural and harmonized. One day another monk visited him and asked him about Master Bodhidharma's intention in coming from India. The monk replied that the handle of his dipper had to be long to reach the water. These words describe the monk's real situation. Since the river flowed deep in a ravine, he needed a dipper with a long handle to reach it. At the same time, they also imply that Master Bodhidharma's coming to China was just a natural and real situation.

The monk reported the situation to Master Seppo. Hearing this story, Master Seppo said that it was wonderful to be like that, but he wanted to test the monk himself. So one day he visited the monk's hut, and said that if the old man

could express the truth, he would let him keep his hair long. However, on hearing these words, the monk made up his mind to let Master Seppo shave his head, because he realized that Master Seppo's words contained the truth.

It is important to notice that Master Seppo did not say "if you *cannot* say anything about the truth I will shave your head," but that "if you *can* say anything about the truth, I will not shave your head." These words have the ring of truth, because to keep the hair long or short is not as important as whether we are able to express the truth. Recognizing such meaning in Master Seppo's words, the monk wanted to have his head shaved by the Master, so he prepared himself. By washing his head, he was expressing the truth through his action. Then the Master shaved the monk's head for him.

In *Shobogenzo Dotoku (Expressing the Truth)*, Master Dogen praised both the monk's and Master Seppo's attitudes. He commented that if Master Seppo had been an ordinary Buddhist Master, he would have thrown away the razor and laughed loudly. Because Master Seppo was a true Buddhist Master, he didn't indulge in such dramatic behavior, and simply shaved the monk's head for him.

EIGHTY-FOUR

Master Isan Reiyu asked Master Ungan Donjo: *I heard that when you were in the temple of Master Yakusan, you played with a lion. Is that true or not?*

Master Ungan said: *Yes, it is true.*

Master Isan said: *Did you play with the lion all the time, or were there some times when you didn't bother?*

Master Ungan said: *When it was necessary for me to play with it, I played with it. When it wasn't necessary, I left it.*

Master Isan said: *When you left the lion, where was the lion?*

Master Ungan said: *I just left it – just left it.*

Commentary

Master Isan asked Master Ungan whether he had played with a lion in Master Yakusan's temple, and Master Ungan affirmed the fact. "Playing with a lion" suggests being familiar with the Buddhist state or reality itself.

Then Master Isan wanted to know about the real concrete situation, and so he asked Master Ungan whether he always had the Buddhist state or not. Master Ungan answered that the real state is much more concrete than that. So he said that when he needed the state, he used it, and when he didn't, he left it alone. These words suggest that Master Ungan was never intellectually conscious of his state, just sometimes he could notice it.

Master Isan was not clear about Master Ungan's explanations, and so he asked what sort of situation he was in when he didn't notice the state.

Master Ungan wanted to describe the state of real action itself, and so he said "I just left it – just left it." He wanted to stop Master Isan from getting caught up in intellectual analysis of the Buddhist state – just to act sincerely is the important point.

EIGHTY-FIVE

Master Roso Ho-un was talking to Master Nansen Fugan: *There is a valuable jewel called "mani" that cannot be known by human beings, but in the Buddha's lineage we keep it directly. What does this mean?*

Master Nansen said: *You and I, the old Master Wan, are discussing it now.*

Master Roso said: *How about when we do not discuss it?*

Master Nansen said: *At that time, it is also in the lineage.*

Master Roso said: *How about the jewel?*

Master Nansen called: *Roso!*

Roso replied: *Yes?*

Master Nansen cried: *Go away! You can't understand my words!*

At that moment, Master Roso experienced the truth.

Commentary

Master Roso asked Master Nansen about the words in the famous Chinese poem called *Shodoka*, or "*The Song of Realizing the Truth*," by Master Yoka Genkaku. The poem mentions a pearl known as "*mani*" that cannot be known by ordinary people, but which is maintained in the Buddha's lineage (lit. storage). Master Nansen liked to refer to himself as "old Master Wan," using his family name. Master Nansen explained that when they were having a discussion, that was just the value of the lineage or the storage of the truth, and so was the time when they had no discussion.

Master Roso then asked about the meaning of the *mani* jewel. Master Nansen, wishing to explain with a concrete example, said that the jewel was just Roso himself. Master Roso could not understand and could only reply, "Yes?" Hearing this, Master Nansen shouted for Roso to go away as he could not understand his words. And at that moment Master Roso recognized the true intention of Master Nansen and realized the meaning of the *mani* jewel, the value of the Buddha's lineage.

EIGHTY-SIX

Master Kazan Chogen from the Keshu district preached and said: *To study Buddhism is called listening to Buddhism. To transcend studying Buddhism is called circumstances. And when we pass over those two things, we can call it true passing.*

Then a monk stepped forward and asked: *What is just true passing?*

Master Kazan said: *I, Kazan, striking a drum.*

The monk said: *What is the truth?*

Master Kazan said: *Kazan striking a drum.*

The monk asked further: *I do not want to ask you the meaning that mind here and now is just Buddha, but what is the meaning of the words "it is not mind, it is not Buddha"?*

Master Kazan said: *I, Kazan, striking a drum.*

The monk said: *How about the matter of ascending Buddha?*

The Master said: *I, Kazan, striking a drum.*

Commentary

Master Kazan explained that a person studies Buddhism by listening to Buddhism and transcends Buddhism through the circumstances themselves. According to Buddhist theory, reality is the combination of self and circumstances. Without circumstances there is no reality – so Buddhists place great importance on circumstances. Master Kazan said that the important thing was to transcend both of these, and that this was called true passing, or liberation.

However, the monk could not understand the meaning of these words so he asked Master Kazan to explain further. Master Kazan only replied that it was him, striking a drum. According to Master Kazan, to actually do something – to act – was the meaning of true passing.

Again the monk persisted, asking about the truth that Gautama Buddha taught. Master Kazan again replied that it was him striking a drum. According to Master Kazan, to strike a drum is just Gautama Buddha's truth itself. So the monk asked further, quoting a famous expression in Buddhism: *"Not mind. Not*

Buddha." Master Kazan thought that these also suggested reality itself, and so he again described reality as himself striking a drum.

Then the monk asked about the state which is beyond Buddha, "*the matter of ascending Buddha.*" Master Kazan would not be drawn into any kind of intellectual discussion and replied for the fourth time that it was him striking a drum.

EIGHTY-SEVEN

One day Master Jushi on Kinpo mountain in the Bushu District, ascended the platform in the Lecture Hall eating some rice cakes. Then he played with one of the cakes and let it roll off the edge of the platform. The monks all joined their hands in reverence, looking at the Master.

The Master said: *Even though you join your hands like that, you know only a half of the situation.*

That evening, the monks requested the Master to preach.

At that time one of the monks said: *Today, Master, you played with a rice cake and when you looked at the many monks with joined hands you said that even though we put our hands together we knew only the half of it. Please, Master, represent the whole.*

The Master pretended to pick up a rice cake in his hand and said: *Do you understand?*

The monk said: *No, I don't understand.*

The Master said: *Even I, Kinpo, can only express a half.*

Commentary

This story suggests that all discernible human activity can only express a half of the entire situation. Even though we want to manifest the whole of reality, it is impossible for us to do so in the real world.

Reality is a totality that cannot be expressed in words, so even though we use action to try and explain it, this is only a partial explanation. Reality is so all-encompassing and complex that a human being's expression about it can never be sufficient to describe the whole of the situation. Further, whether we use words or use a non-verbal means to try to explain reality, neither is ever totally sufficient because they are merely expressions or explanations, and not reality itself.

Master Kinpo Jushi behaved rather strangely at the edge of the platform in the Lecture Hall. Then he insisted that the monks only saw a half of the situation. So in his lecture in the evening, after imitating the action of picking up a rice cake, he said that even he, the Master, was only able to manifest a partial explanation in his own behavior.

EIGHTY-EIGHT

One day a governor called Ri Botsu visited Master Chijo in Kiso temple and said: *I do not want to ask you about the theory of the three types of vehicle or the twelve divisions of the teaching. But what is the ancestral Master's intention in coming from the West?*

The Master held up his fist at once and said: *Have you understood?*

The governor said: *I don't understand.*

The Master said: *You are a person who feels satisfied in your Buddhist studies and can skillfully manage important tasks. However, you don't even know the meaning of a fist!*

The governor said: *Truly, I do not understand.*

The Master said: *When we meet with someone we accept him and utilize him on the way, and when we do not meet anyone we follow society's ways.*

Commentary

The governor said that he didn't want to know about various Buddhist theories, but about Master Bodhidharma's intention in coming from India to China to transmit Buddhism. The Master just held up his fist, wanting to suggest Master Bodhidharma's concrete action. The governor did not understand what he meant, and so the Master explained that when Master Bodhidharma met people in China who were diligent in studying Buddhism he was able to transmit Buddhism to them.

However, had he not met anyone who wanted to study Buddhism, he would have just left without doing anything, following secular society. In short, Master Bodhidharma lived as a human being – as himself. This attitude is the Buddhist way. Even Master Bodhidharma followed the historical circumstances around him.

EIGHTY-NINE

One day a monk asked Master Hofuku Seikatsu of the Sho district: *If our family is very poor and such a state continues on and on, what should we do?*

The Master said: *It becomes impossible to concentrate properly.*

The monk said: *Why is it impossible to concentrate properly?*

The Master said: *Our parents or family are sometimes our enemies.*

The monk said: *If they are parents or family, why did they become enemies?*

The Master said: *If you are not prepared inside, you will not be able to act outside.*

The monk said: *But if we can defeat it, who's victory is it?*

The Master said: *There has never been an example of such a situation that can be praised.*

The monk said: *If that is true, even though we make enormous efforts there would be no reward.*

The Master said: *There is a reward, but we do not cling to it after getting it.*

The monk said: *After getting the reward, why do we not cling to it?*

The Master said: *Haven't you heard the expression that although peace may be created by a General, the General never governs a peaceful country.*

Commentary

This story is a very real description of life. The monk's question was what to do when family life is very poor. The Master's answer was very concrete – it is difficult to concentrate on studying Buddhism in such a situation. The monk asked the reason, and the Master said that although we usually think that our parents or family support us, sometimes the opposite is true; they make our life more difficult. The monk asked why, and the Master answered that when our mental state (inside) is not good because our family situation is disturbing us, then it is difficult for us to act (outside).

The monk suggested that in such a difficult situation, no-one can win. The Master answered that situations like that are always difficult, and that although sincere effort will bring success, we should not indulge ourselves in that success; we should just continue to make our efforts. The General wins the war, but does not govern the peace. We should move on.

NINETY

A monk asked Master Baso Do-itsu: *What was Master Bodhidharma's intention in coming from the West?*

Master Baso said: *Please come here. I would like to tell you something.*

The monk approached.

Master Baso grabbed the monk's ear and suddenly slapped him saying: *Six ears do not join together in discussing tactics.*

Commentary

A monk asked about Master Bodhidharma who went to China from India. Master Baso wanted to demonstrate his answer through action, so he ordered the monk to approach and then hit him. The expression "*six ears do not discuss secret tactics*" means simply that it is not appropriate to discuss confidential matters in large groups. In other words the reason Master Bodhidharma went to China from India cannot be stated overtly. Master Baso's meaning is that Master Bodhidharma's intention was related to his circumstances – to the real situation itself – which cannot be captured only through verbal explanations. Because of this he wanted to express his real answer through his dynamic action.

NINETY-ONE

One day Master Tenno Dogo asked Master Sekito Kisen: *What is the fundamental principle of Buddhism?*

Master Sekito said: *It isn't obtainable. It isn't knowable.*

Master Dogo said: *Is there a more realistic expression?*

Master Sekito said: *The wide sky does not hinder the flying white clouds.*

Commentary

When Master Tenno Dogo asked Master Sekito Kisen about the fundamental principle of Buddhism, Master Sekito replied that the fundamental principle is not an object to be acquired or understood. Master Dogo wanted a more concrete explanation, so Master Sekito said the wide sky does not keep the white clouds from flying. His words suggest that the fundamental principle of Buddhism includes the whole Universe – and the Universe does not hinder the free play of everything within it. In other words, Buddhism says that reality always exists freely – here and now.

NINETY-TWO

Master Chokei Eryo asked Master Hofuku Juten: *When we look at matter we are looking directly at mind. Now, can you see that boat?*

Master Hofuku said: *I see it.*

Master Chokei: *Forgetting about the boat for a while, where is the mind?*

Master Hofuku pointed at the boat again.

Commentary

Master Chokei discussed the meaning of the Buddhist theory that when we look at matter, we look at mind. In other words, subject (mind) and object (matter) are one. To show the meaning of this theory in the real world, Master Chokei asked if Master Hofuku could see the boat. A boat is a physical object, but it also has value and functions; so when we look at a boat we automatically attribute such functions to it.

Master Hofuku replied that he could see it. Master Chokei then asked about the mind. So Master Hofuku pointed at the boat again in order to show that the physical object and its function and value cannot be separated – in reality they are one.

NINETY-THREE

When Sekiso Keisho became a disciple of Master Dogo Enchi, he asked the Master: *What is the truth that can be seen through the eyes?*

Master Dogo called the novice. The novice replied. Master Dogo said: *Please add some fresh water to the vase.* Then Master Dogo asked Master Sekiso politely: *What did you just ask me?*

Master Sekiso repeated his question. Master Dogo stood up and left at once. Master Sekiso had a realization at that moment.

Commentary

The word “novice” indicates Master Sekiso, so perhaps this story occurred soon after Sekiso became a disciple of Master Dogo, and that is why he is referred to as a novice.

Master Sekiso asked Master Dogo about the truth that can be seen through the eyes. This is a good question, because Buddhist truth is not only theory but something concrete and real. Buddhist truth should be seen directly with our own eyes.

Then Master Dogo called out to Master Sekiso and asked him to pour fresh water into a vase containing flowers. This suggests Buddhist truth that can be seen in the action of our daily life; he could see that the water in the vase needed changing. Master Dogo tested whether Sekiso had understood his teachings by asking him to repeat his question. Master Sekiso just repeated the same question as before, so Master Dogo stood up and left without saying anything. On seeing the Master’s behavior, Master Sekiso realized the real situation in front of him.

NINETY-FOUR

One day a monk asked Master Sozan Honjaku: *I heard that you said in your teachings that the Great Sea has no place for lifeless bodies. What is this sea?*

The Master said: *It is something that includes the whole of existence.*

The monk said: *Then why does it have no place for lifeless bodies?*

The Master said: *Because things that are lifeless do not belong there.*

The monk said: *But if it includes the whole of existence, why don't lifeless things belong there?*

The Master said: *The whole of existence is beyond that sort of function; it is beyond [the concept] "life."*

Commentary

The Great Sea is a metaphor for reality, the whole of existence. In Master Sozan's teaching, he said that just as the sea does not accept dead bodies (they are usually washed up on the shore), so reality does not accept anything without value or significance. In other words, there is nothing in the Universe that is without value.

However, the monk was caught by the Master's metaphor and wanted to know why reality as the sea doesn't accept dead bodies. The Master told him that it is because dead bodies do not belong in the sea; things without value do not belong in reality. However, the monk was still caught by the words of the Master's metaphorical teaching. He wanted to know why reality doesn't contain everything including dead bodies. The Master replied that reality does not function like the monk's image of the sea; it is beyond that sort of categorization. It is beyond concepts like "dead" or "alive." It is something inclusive and ineffable that exists here and now.

NINETY-FIVE

Master Nansen Fugan said to an assembly of monks: *The truth does not exist outside of matter. Outside of matter there cannot be any truth.*

Master Joshu Jushin stepped forward and asked: *What is the truth outside of matter, then?*

Master Nansen struck him at once.

Master Joshu said: *Master! Don't strike me. If you do so, in the future you may strike someone by mistake.*

Master Nansen said: *It is very easy to distinguish between a dragon and a snake. But it is very difficult to deceive a Buddhist monk.*

Commentary

Master Nansen preached that the truth is in matter and there is no truth that is outside of matter. This follows the fundamental Buddhist view that matter and value or meaning are one. Therefore, it is impossible for reality, or the truth, to exist without matter. Then Master Joshu stepped forward and, in what may have been a somewhat sarcastic manner, asked about the situation of the truth outside of matter. Master Nansen then struck him because he felt his facetious question showed that his attitude towards the Buddhist discussion was not serious. However, Master Joshu criticized Master Nansen's striking him because he had asked the question based on his sincere attitude in Buddhism. Master Nansen recognized Master Joshu's sincerity, so he said it was easy for him to distinguish a dragon from a snake, that is, excellent and less able students, but that Master Joshu could not deceive him.

NINETY-SIX

A monk asked Ryuge Koton: *What concrete thing did the ancestral masters get when they obtained the peaceful state?*

The Master said: *It is like a thief who enters an empty room.*

Commentary

Master Ryuge Koton said that the state of the ancient masters who entered the ineffable is like a thief who has broken into a room with tremendous effort, only to find that the room is empty. In other words the ultimate state of Buddhist study is recognition that reality exists as it is, it is empty of anything superfluous. There is nothing more or less than reality.

NINETY-SEVEN

A Buddhist Master, To Inpo, arrived at Mount Isan and at the top end of the Zazen Hall he spread out his clothes and took out his eating utensils. Master Isan Reiyu heard that his Master Uncle had arrived. Without delay he put on his formal robe and went inside the Hall. When Master Inpo saw Master Isan coming he lay down on the floor and pretended to sleep. Master Isan then went back to his own room. Master Inpo left the temple at once. After a short time Master Isan asked his servant monk: *Is my Master Uncle there or not?*

The servant replied: *He has already left.*

Master Isan asked: *When he left, what did he say?*

The monk replied: *He didn't say anything.*

Master Isan: *Don't say that he didn't say anything. His voice was as loud as thunder.*

Commentary

Master Godai Inpo visited Master Isan's temple. Master Inpo was a disciple of Master Baso Do-itsu. Master Isan's Master, Hyakujo Ekai, was also a disciple of Master Baso Do-itsu. Therefore Master Hyakujo Ekai and Master Godai Inpo were brothers in the Buddhist lineage, so Isan called Master Inpo, "Master Uncle." Master Inpo entered the Zazen Hall, took off his traveling clothes and brought out his eating utensils. This suggests that Master Inpo wanted to stay at the temple for a while. Hearing of the arrival of Master Inpo, Master Isan wanted to salute his Dharma brother, so he put on his formal robes and went to the Zazen Hall. Master Inpo did not want to receive such a formal salute so he lay on the floor and pretended to sleep. Master Inpo felt that Master Isan's attitude toward him was too reverent, so he thought his stay at the temple may not be so peaceful, and he decided to leave at once.

Although Master Inpo did not say anything when he left, his behavior came from his long Buddhist practice. Master Isan recognized the meaning of such behavior. The servant thought that Master Inpo had said nothing when he left, but Master Isan recognized that Master Inpo's actions had spoken as loud as thunder.

Master Inpo behaved freely, following the situation, and Master Isan revered his intention. We cannot say that Master Isan had made a mistake in greeting Master Inpo as he did. Master Isan's attitude was also very natural and normal.

NINETY-EIGHT

Master Shinzan Somitsu in the Tanshu district was crossing a river with Master Tozan Ryokai. Master Tozan said: *Don't make a mistake and fall into the water!*

Master Somitsu said: *If we make a mistake we will never live to cross the river.*

Master Tozan said: *What is the state without mistakes?*

Master Somitsu said: *Me, now, crossing the river with you, Reverend Patriarch.*

Commentary

Master Tozan and Master Somitsu were both disciples of Master Ungan Donjo. Therefore they were brothers in the Buddhist lineage and they sometimes went traveling together to pursue the Buddhist truth. On one such trip they came to a dangerous river. If they fell into the river they would be swept away. At this point Master Tozan asked an appropriate question, *"What is the state without mistakes."* Master Somitsu replied that this time and place in which they were making their sincere effort was none other than the state without mistakes. Sincere action in the moment of the present is the Buddhist state; it is reality itself. This does not mean, however, that we can always avoid getting wet! What we can do is just what Master Tozan and Master Somitsu were doing: making their sincere efforts in the reality of the present moment.

NINETY-NINE

Master Kyujo of Kegon Temple in Keicho City visited the temple of Master Tozan and asked: *I am a student who hasn't studied Buddhist theory yet, and it is difficult for me to avoid being emotional.*

Master Tozan said: *Have you discovered any Buddhist theories yet?*

Master Kyujo said: *I have no idea about Buddhist theories.*

Master Tozan said: *From where does your emotionality derive?*

Master Kyujo said: *That is the question I am asking.*

Master Tozan said: *Then it is necessary for you to go directly to the place where there is no grass for tens of thousands of miles.*

Master Kyujo asked: *Will the place with no grass let me go there or not?*

Master Tozan said: *You should go there directly.*

Commentary

In response to Master Kyujo's questions, Master Tozan asked where Master Kegon Kyujo had got his emotionality, because recognizing one's emotion usually requires study. This was precisely what Master Kyujo wanted to find out. So Master Tozan said to go directly to the place where there is no grass. Grass is a symbol of difficulties or hindrances, so the place with no grass means a place where we are not hindered in our pursuit of the truth.

Master Kyujo had some doubt as to whether or not he would be accepted in such a place. Master Tozan insisted that he should go there directly; the Buddhist way is the way of action, and if we act, we can go there directly, at this very moment. The practice of Zazen is the standard state of action.

ONE HUNDRED

Master Shigen of Mount Zuigan in the Daishu district said to Master Kassan: *To be real is easy, not to be real is very difficult. When things are real then situations are clear; when things are not real it is like existing in space. So I would like to ask the Master what is the situation of being real and not being real.*

Master Kassan said: *I am afraid that I may deceive you, Reverend Patriarch.*

Master Shigen cried, *Katsu!*

Then he said: *You, old Master, how could you know anything about the time here and now?* Then he left at once.

Later, a monk quoted this story to Master Ganto Zenkatsu. Master Ganto said: *It is regrettable that one line of my Buddhist teachings has drained away in such a situation.*

Commentary

Master Zuigan Shigen told Master Kassan Zen-e that to be real (literally, to be like “this”) is not difficult; not to be real is rather difficult. Usually people find it very difficult to be realistic. So Master Shigen’s opinion was different from that of ordinary people. Such words suggest Master Shigen’s Buddhist state; he found it easy to be part of reality and not easy to be separated from reality. Then he asked Master Kassan the relationship between being real and not being real. This relationship points to reality itself, which cannot be classified either as “real” or “not real.”

Hearing this question Master Kassan did not want to answer. Any answer that he could give could not express the whole situation and might have the effect of misleading Master Shigen. Master Shigen could not understand the profound meaning of Master Kassan’s refusal, so he haughtily criticized Master Kassan and left the temple. On hearing this story later, Master Ganto Zenkatsu, who was Master Shigen’s teacher, found it regrettable that his disciple could not understand Master Kassan’s words.

BOOK THREE

ONE

Quoting:

The time approached when Master Bodhidharma was going back to India in the west (that is, he was going to die). He said to his disciples: *My time is going to come. I want you to express what you have learned.*

Disciple Dofuku said: *What I want to express is that I do not become attached to words, but at the same time I do not ignore them. I practice the state of truth.*

The Master said: *You have got my skin.*

Nun Soji said: *What I have understood is like Master Ananda, who looked at the country of Ashiku Buddha once, but never looked at it again.*

The Master said: *You have got my flesh.*

Doiku said: *The four elements (earth, water, fire, wind) are originally as if they were nothing (that is, empty) and the five aggregates (matter, feeling, idea, action, consciousness) are not real existence. So my viewpoint is without fixed entity.*

The Master said: *You have got my bones.*

Finally, Master Taiso Eka stepped forward, prostrated, and stood in his place.

The Master said: *You have got my marrow.*

Then the Master transmitted the Dharma and gave the ritual robes to his disciples.

Commentary

When Master Bodhidharma felt his death approaching, he asked his four disciples to express what they had gained from their Buddhist practice.

Disciple Dofuku said that Buddhists are not attached to words, but at the same time they do not say that words are without value.

The Nun Soji said that what she had gained was like Master Ananda, who once looked at the country of Ashiku Buddha, but never again. The country of Ashiku Buddha is a metaphor for the idealistic state. Nun Soji, like Master Ananda, glimpsed the idealistic state once, and never entered it again.

Disciple Doiku said the four elements and the five aggregates that make up the Universe and humankind are only categories in our minds. These words suggest the independent Buddhist attitude toward the material elements of the Universe. Doiku said that in the Buddhist state there is nothing that he identifies with as a thing, object, or possession.

Master Taiso Eka did not say anything; he merely stepped forward, prostrated himself in front of Master Bodhidharma, and then returned to his place holding his hands in *shashu*.

People usually conclude that Master Taiso Eka was the most advanced disciple because he recognized the futility of verbal expression and revered real conduct. Most commentators on this koan have thought that skin, flesh, bones, and marrow were meant to indicate different levels of understanding; but in *Shobogenzo Katto (The Complicated)*, Master Dogen shows that he does not agree with those interpretations. He says that skin, flesh, bones, and marrow are all on the same level. All four disciples had realized what Buddhism is. Master Bodhidharma gave the ritual robes to them all.

TWO

Master Obaku Ki-un preached to an assembly: *You students are all just intoxicated, eating the residue of the sake. If you wander around like this, how will you realize the real situation here and now? Do you not know that there are no true Zen masters, even in great Tang Dynasty China?*

Then a monk stepped forward and said: *What about the many masters in all the various districts who are collecting and keeping many students?*

Master Obaku said: *I am not denying that they practice Zazen, but there are no true masters.*

Commentary

Master Obaku Ki-un criticized the situation in Buddhist society in the Tang Dynasty in which he lived. He said in that age there were no true Buddhist masters who had realized the facts here and now.

Then one monk asked Master Obaku about the Buddhist masters in those parts who led their students along the right path and presided over them.

Master Obaku said even though they were diligent in practicing Zazen, they did not have the ability to be masters of their students.

Master Obaku's words suggest that even though Buddhist masters of that time were diligent in practicing Zazen, many of them did not understand Buddhist theory, and so could not teach it to their students.

THREE

Master Gensa said to an assembly: *Reverend monks in many districts are all trying to save all living beings using material things, but how would they teach people who had the three classes of disability if they met them? A blind person cannot see the mallet being picked up to strike the block, or see the hossu when the master holds it up. A deaf person cannot hear anything even though their master may make great efforts to explain. A mute person cannot say anything even though their master may ask them to preach. If it is impossible for these monks to teach such people, how can they carry on teaching their students? Buddhist teaching cannot always be transmitted in such ways.*

Rakan Keichin, a monk in the order of Master Gensa, stepped forward and said: *I have eyes and ears, Master. How can you teach me?*

The Master said: *I am ashamed.*

Then he went straight back to his room.

Commentary

Master Gensa described the situation in which monks are transmitting Buddhist teachings using material things, like hitting a block with a mallet, or holding up the *hossu* to describe reality at this moment. He pointed out that this method would not work for people who are blind, deaf, or dumb. The way that Buddhism is taught must be suited to the needs of the student; not just the use of one method, but using a variety of ways.

According to Master Gensa, some masters were only teaching with objects. Master Rakan Keichin replied to this rather critical statement in a more realistic way. He asked Master Gensa how he can deal, not with some hypothetical situation with disabled students, but with the real situation at this moment: how to teach a real student – himself – when asked for instruction.

To teach Buddhism is always to teach something that is impossible to explain. Master Rakan's reply amounts to a stern criticism of his master's words. Master Gensa admitting that he felt ashamed is his affirmation of Master Rakan's words.

FOUR

Master Tozan Shiken, the third generation on Mount Tozan, was one day asked by a monk: *When I and the other students are going along a narrow path, what is the best way to proceed?*

The Master said: *Very dangerous snakes can be found even on a wide road, and I advise you not to attack one directly.*

The monk said: *If I attack it directly what will happen?*

The Master said: *Just at that moment, there will be no room for you to escape.*

The monk said: *Would you tell me about the situation "just at this moment"?*

The Master said: *All things are lost.*

The monk said: *Where have they gone?*

The Master said: *Because of the thick grass we cannot look for them.*

The monk said: *Master, if you actually go to the bank of the river you can get there from the beginning.*

Rubbing his hands, the Master said: *The atmosphere now is rather poisonous.*

Commentary

The monk asked about an actual situation in which he and the other monks were walking along a narrow path. Master Shiken said that we can often meet a poisonous snake even on a broad road, so we must take care on a narrow path.

The monk asked what would happen if he attacked the snake directly, that is, if he approached reality directly. The Master replied that it is impossible to escape from reality. We are always just in reality at every moment.

Then the monk moved on to a more realistic level; he asked the Master to describe the actual situation at that moment. The Master said that all things and phenomena are lost, or disappear. This means that in entering the present moment fully, we lose all concepts and ideas about things. However, the monk followed on with another rather intellectual comment.

The Master then indicated that it was time to terminate their discussion, or risk falling into the poisonous atmosphere that results from approaching problems and life itself too abstractly.

FIVE

Master Ryuge Koton from the Tanshu district became Master Suibi Mugaku's disciple for the first time and asked: *What was Master Bodhidharma's intention in coming from India in the West?*

Master Suibi said: *Please bring me the zenban (a wooden board used to support the head during long periods of Zazen).*

Master Ryuge brought the zenban and gave it to Master Suibi. Master Suibi took the zenban and struck Master Ryuge with it.

Master Ryuge said: *I will allow you to strike me, but so far your behavior doesn't show me anything of Master Bodhidharma's intention.*

Some time later, Ryuge was studying under Master Rinzai and asked him the same question. Master Rinzai asked Master Ryuge to bring him a zafu (a cushion for Zazen). Master Rinzai took it and struck Master Ryuge with it. Master Ryuge said that exactly the same thing had happened to him in the order of Master Suibi.

After Master Ryuge became the master of a temple, a monk asked him: *Master, when you met those two reverend masters in the past did you agree with them, or not?*

Master Ryuge said: *I affirmed them just at that moment, but still their behavior did not demonstrate to me anything of Master Bodhidharma's intention.*

Commentary

Master Suibi struck Master Ryuge Koton with the zenban to demonstrate something about Master Bodhidharma's intention in coming to China to teach Buddhism. Master Ryuge had been a student of Master Tozan, whose way of teaching was rather natural and gentle. He thought that the conduct of Master Suibi and Master Rinzai was not very natural; that it contained some intention.

Master Bodhidharma had taken three years to reach China, and he let Buddhism develop rather naturally. Master Ryuge could find nothing of Master Bodhidharma's natural way of teaching in their behavior.

SIX

Master Sekitei asked his servant monk: *Where are you going?*

The monk said: *I would like to go to the Zazen Hall and finish my lunch.*

The Master said: *How could I not know that you will go to the Zazen Hall and finish your lunch!*

The monk said: *What else should I have said?*

The Master said: *I am asking you about your original self.*

The monk said: *If you ask me about my original self, I am just going to eat lunch.*

The Master said: *It is no mistake that you are my assistant.*

Commentary

Since Master Sekitei's question was intended in the philosophical sense, he was disappointed that the monk answered in such a concrete way.

When the Master pressed for a more philosophical answer the monk insisted that his concrete behavior was his original self. He refused to be drawn into an abstract discussion; he considered the question on the basis of reality.

The Master affirmed the monk's understanding, saying that he was pleased that the monk was his personal assistant.

SEVEN

One day, Joji O-Kei, arriving at the Zazen Hall with Master Rinzai, asked:
Do monks chant sutras in the Zazen Hall?

Master Rinzai said: *No they do not chant sutras.*

The Joji asked: *Are they learning Shuzen (Zen concentration)?*

Master Rinzai said: *No they are not learning Shuzen.*

The Joji said: *The monks do not chant sutras and are not learning Shuzen.
Then what are they doing?*

Master Rinzai: *Usually I make them into Buddhist patriarchs.*

The Joji asked: *Although gold dust is valuable, if it falls into the eye it will
make you blind. Is that what you mean?*

Master Rinzai said: *I guessed that you might be nothing more than a secular
man.*

Commentary

The title *Joji* denotes a government official who attends on the Emperor, and O-Kei was his family name. He also appears in story 64 as O-Keisho. The *Joji* was surprised when Master Rinzai said that the monks neither chanted sutras nor learned *Shuzen*, a form of Zen concentration.

Many people, including the *Joji* thought that Zazen was some kind of intentional concentration of the mind in order to achieve some special state. Master Rinzai denied this. The *Joji* did not understand the real situation in Master Rinzai's temple. From Master Rinzai's denials, he surmised that chanting sutras and *Shuzen*, although valuable, could work against you if you did too much of them.

Master Rinzai said that he had felt the official to be nothing more than a secular man. Despite his interest in Buddhism the official had no real understanding of it. Life in Master Rinzai's temple was not intentional effort to attain something. Practicing Zazen and all the other natural day-to-day activities of the temple were making his students into Buddhist masters.

EIGHT

One day a monk asked Master Unmon: *It is the beginning of autumn and the end of summer. In the future [when I become master of a temple,] if someone asks me a question, how should I answer him?*

The Master said: *If you have that attitude, all the monks in your temple will leave.*

The monk said: *Where is my mistake?*

The Master said: *Please pay me back for the cost of your meals for ninety days.*

Commentary

"The beginning of autumn and the end of summer" refers to the end of the traditional ninety-day summer *sesshin* (Zazen retreat). At the end of the *sesshin*, a monk asked Master Unmon what he should say after he became the master of a temple and was asked questions about Buddhism.

Master Unmon was disappointed in the monk and said that if he could not answer through his own knowledge or ability, then all the monks would leave his temple.

Since the monk could not see his own stupidity, Master Unmon ironically asked him to return the money he had spent feeding the monk during the summer retreat.

NINE

Master Isan Reiyu preached to an assembly: *After this old monk has retired, I will go to the house of a temple supporter at the foot of the mountain and become a castrated water buffalo. Then I will write five words on its right side that say "So-and-so, monk of Mount Isan." Then if anyone calls it a monk of Mount Isan I will claim to be a castrated water buffalo. If someone calls it a castrated water buffalo I will claim to be monk So-and-so from Mount Isan. Please discuss this for a while. When should it be called by one name and when by the other?*

Then Master Kyozan stepped forward from the assembly, prostrated himself, and left.

Commentary

A castrated water buffalo is content to live quietly, disturbing no-one. Master Isan was talking about the time after he retired from life in the temple. He planned to live with some supporters of the temple at the foot of the mountain. At such a time by what name should this water buffalo be called? He said that it would have two names, one referring to his life in the temple and the other to his life in retirement.

Does either name really capture the reality which it purports to label? Referring to his situation in retirement we might call him a castrated water buffalo, but if we refer to his days in the temple we might call him a monk of Mount Isan. Either way, reality is only one and cannot be contained by names, no matter which we choose to use. Master Isan's question was a way of asking, *"How can we capture reality with a name?"* Master Kyozan realized the impossibility of the attempt and so expressed his answer with concrete action.

We can say that all things can be given two names. One name to be used when we see something from the materialistic viewpoint that refers to their concrete form. The other name comes from the idealistic view and refers to the object or phenomenon when seen from the viewpoint of its meaning or value.

Even though we can see things from these two different viewpoints, reality remains one unnamable something.

TEN

One day a monk asked National Master Nan-yo Echu: *What is the original body of Vairocana?*

The Master said: *Please bring me a pitcher of drinking water.*

The monk brought the pitcher to his master.

The Master said: *Please take the pitcher back to where you got it from.*

The monk asked his question again.

The Master said: *It has been a long time since the eternal Buddha passed away.*

Commentary

A monk asked Nan-yo Echu about the meaning of the original body of Vairocana. This is the name of a Buddha who is symbolized by the sun. In some schools of Buddhism, Vairocana is considered the highest Buddha.

Master Nan-yo Echu thought that the original body of Vairocana simply refers to our behavior in day-to-day life, to the state of simple action in the present. So he asked the monk to bring him a pitcher of drinking water.

After the monk brought the pitcher, the Master asked him to take it back again. These instructions suggest that Vairocana's original body is what we do in our day-to-day life. The monk could not understand the Master's suggestion so he asked his question again.

The Master expressed his regret at the monk's lack of understanding by saying that the eternal Buddha had passed away a long time ago.

ELEVEN

Quoting:

One day a monk asked Master Sozan: *Even though your student has returned to his father, why is his attitude toward his student so indifferent?*

The Master said: *This is a very natural attitude.*

The monk said: *Where is the compassion between father and son?*

The Master said: *In this situation, compassion between father and son is realized for the first time.*

The monk asked: *What is this compassion between father and son?*

The Master said: *Even if we wanted to cut our relationship with a sword or an axe it would be impossible to separate us.*

Commentary

A monk who had been Master Sozan's student returned to the temple after an absence of several years. Master Sozan did not seem to show any special feeling about the disciple's return, and so the monk felt some disappointment. He criticized the Master's seemingly unexpressive attitude.

Master Sozan replied that he and his student were so close that it was not necessary to show their compassion with emotional gestures. Even though the Master did not show any overt feeling toward his disciple, the relationship was so concrete that even a sword or axe could not cut through it.

This story suggests that closeness between people need not always be displayed through overtly emotional behavior.

TWELVE

One day Master Rakan Keichin asked a monk: *Where have you come from just now?*

The monk said: *From the Northern district.*

The Master said: *How is Buddhism in the Northern district.*

The monk said: *Discussions are vigorous and full.*

The Master said: *How can those discussions be superior to planting rice and eating it in this district!*

The monk said: *It is impossible for us to deny the existence of the three worlds.*

The Master said: *What do you call the three worlds?*

The monk had some kind of realization.

Commentary

One day Master Rakan Keichin (in the original text he is called Jizo, the name of the temple where he stayed) asked a monk where he had come from. The monk said the northern district (i.e. north of the Yangtze River). Chinese civilization developed in the Northern district and spread to the Southern district, so “Southern district” usually has a connotation of uncivilized or backward.

The monk answered the Master’s question by saying that people there are very vigorous in discussing Buddhist philosophical problems. Master Rakan didn’t think Buddhism is to have discussions on philosophical problems so he said it is better for us to eat the rice that we produce in this district.

However, the monk insisted that we cannot deny the existence of the three kinds of world – the world as it is divided in the minds of ordinary people. According to Buddhism ordinary people divide the world into three kinds: (1) the world of volition, or idealism; (2) the world of matter, or materialism; (3) the world of non-matter, or action. To synthesize those three worlds into one reality is the aim of Buddhism. The monk said that in reality, we cannot avoid these three worlds.

Master Rakan asked the monk what he called these three worlds in order to draw attention to the fact that reality is undivided and nameless. We cannot find these three worlds outside of the discriminating mind. There is only one. The monk then realized something about reality.

THIRTEEN

One day a monk asked Master Dogo Enchi: *Why don't Bodhisattvas of Transcendent Mystical Abilities leave a trace by which they can be followed?*

The Master said: *Someone who has realized the truth knows.*

The monk said: *Master, do you know?*

The Master said: *No I don't know.*

The monk said: *Why don't you know?*

The Master said: *Go away, you do not understand my intention.*

Commentary

A monk asked Master Dogo Enchi why a Bodhisattva of Transcendent Mystical Abilities does not show any trace so that people can follow him. What does this strange statement mean? Master Dogo replied that someone who has experienced the truth sees the trace of the Bodhisattva. He meant that the state of the Bodhisattva is not abstract, but real experience.

Although the Bodhisattva doesn't show a trace, someone who has realized the same state knows that state in real experience. Acting, being fully in the present, is to let go of past and future, and in that state there is no awareness of where we have come from or where we are going to. When the monk asked whether the Master himself knew, the Master answered that he did not. The state of being fully in the present moment has no awareness of itself, and cannot be grasped intellectually.

The monk didn't understand his Master's answer. On hearing this, the Master realized that the monk did not understand what he was trying to express, so he curtailed the conversation.

FOURTEEN

Master Fuketsu Ensho preached to an assembly: *If we establish even a single molecule of matter, families and states will become prosperous and I, an old man in a field, show anxiety on my face. If we don't establish a single molecule, families and states will decline, but I, an old man in a field, feel stable and peaceful. When we understand this problem clearly, this old monk is now an Acarya. If we do not understand clearly, there is no value in being an Acarya, and we are all old monks. Both old monks and Acaryas can enlighten people and at the same time delude people. Do you want to know where this old monk is?*

He clapped his hands on his left side and said: *Right here! Do you want to know where the Acarya is?*

He then clapped his hands on his right side and said: *Right here!*

Commentary

Master Fuketsu Ensho preached that if we believe that reality includes only the materialistic aspects of society, the family and the state will flourish, but he will feel anxious and sad. And if we do not, the family and the state will decline, but he will feel peaceful. Here in the first phase of his explanation, he is explaining the relationship between the progress of materialistic society and the Buddhist state.

In the second phase of his explanation, he says that in practice, sometimes a Buddhist monk can have the virtues of an Acarya, and sometimes not. This is concrete fact.

In the third phase of his explanation, he says that old monks and Acaryas alike can both enlighten and delude. There are not two separate categories in the reality of the monk's real conduct.

And in the final phase of his explanation, Master Fuketsu uses the real action of clapping his hands to the left and to the right to show that there is only one real person here and now, beyond both "old monk" and "Acarya."

FIFTEEN

One day a monk said to Master Tendo Kankei: *This student who is approaching you has a proud manner. Master, please teach me what is right.*

The Master said: *In this temple just to relieve ourselves is enough. Why should I preach about being proud or being right?*

The monk said: *The Master's answer makes me feel that I should buy new straw sandals and travel in search of Buddhism.*

The Master said: *Come here.*

The monk approached and the Master said: *What kind of mistake is there in this old monk's answer?*

The monk could not reply.

Then the Master struck the monk.

Commentary

The monk asked Master Tendo Kankei to correct his behavior because he was worrying about being too proud or not right. The Master denied the monk's idealistic attitude. He said that in his temple monks only needed to go to the toilet when necessary. He wanted to say that just our simple acts in day-to-day life are Buddhism itself. There is no need to strive to improve ourselves in an idealistic way.

The monk couldn't understand, so he replied that he felt the need to search for Buddhism elsewhere. The Master asked the monk why his answer had offended him, but the monk had no reply. So the Master struck the monk to bring him out of his intellectual worrying about his own behavior.

SIXTEEN

Master Rinzai asked a *Kansu* (a monk who had come to work for him in the position of Prior): *Where have you come from?*

The *Kansu* replied: *I came here by selling rice for making rice cakes throughout the district.*

Master Rinzai said: *Have you sold it all.*

The *Kansu* replied: *Yes I have sold it all.*

Master Rinzai traced a circle on the ground with a stick and said: *Have you sold all this?*

Straight away, the *Kansu* cried: *Katsu!* The Master struck him.

Later, when the *Tenzo* (temple cook) arrived, Master Rinzai told him what had happened.

The *Tenzo* said: *That Kansu did not understand what you meant.*

Master Rinzai said: *How about you?*

The *Tenzo* prostrated himself. Master Rinzai struck him.

Commentary

A monk had come to work in Master Rinzai's temple as the *Kansu*, selling special glutinous rice used to make rice cakes (*mochi*) in order to pay his way, because his temple had fallen on hard times. Asked whether he had managed to sell all his rice, the *Kansu* replied that he had.

Master Rinzai was more interested in whether the *Kansu* had the truth of Buddhism or not, and his tracing a circle on the ground was asking whether the *Kansu* had understood reality. The *Kansu's* shout of *Katsu!* in reply did not satisfy Master Rinzai, who felt that he was just imitating the behavior of the masters of old, and did not express anything real of his own. So he struck him.

Later, when recounting the story to the *Tenzo*, Master Rinzai was not satisfied with the *Tenzo's* prostration either, which he felt was also just in imitation of the ancient masters. He wanted these monks to express their own understanding, but they did not.

SEVENTEEN

Master Kankei Shikan arrived at Master Rinzai's temple to study Buddhism with him. When Master Rinzai saw Master Shikan, he held on to him so that he could not move away. Master Shikan said: *I understand.*

Letting go of the Master, Master Rinzai said: *I will permit you to rest here for a while.*

After Master Kankei Shikan had become master of his own temple, he said to his assembly: *When I met Master Rinzai there were no words. Having arrived directly in the here and now, I am satisfied without them.*

Commentary

This story described the meeting between Master Kankei Shikan and Master Rinzai. Master Rinzai held on to him, noticing that he was an excellent student, but being rather proud, did not say explicitly that he wanted him to stay. Master Shikan realized what Master Rinzai really meant, and so he stayed on in the temple.

After Master Shikan became master of his own temple he said in his talk that in Master Rinzai's temple there was no discussion, but his Buddhist life was complete. He was able to arrive in the present and this state had continued until today. He felt completely satisfied.

EIGHTEEN

Three colleagues, Master Seppo Gison, Master Ganto Zenkatsu, and Master Kinzan Bunsui, visiting Buddhist masters throughout the country together, arrived in the Reishu district, where Master Kinzan had been appointed master of a temple. The other two masters traveled on together and arrived at Gozan Mountain, where they were stopped by snow. Master Ganto just slept all day. Master Seppo just practiced Zazen all day.

One day Master Seppo called to his friend and said: *Brother Monk, please get up for a bit.*

Master Ganto said: *What do you want to do?*

Master Seppo said: *Although I have been practicing Zazen for a long time, I haven't got a good state. When we were traveling with Reishu, I was constantly disturbed by him. Now we have to stop here. You Brother Monk, however, just sleep.*

Master Ganto shouted at him and said: *Just have a good sleep! You just sit on the floor all day, looking like a piece of ground in a remote village! Some day in the future when you become a temple master, you will intoxicate and mislead men and women.*

Master Seppo pointed at his breast and said: *In here I have not become peaceful. I cannot delude myself that it is not like this.*

Master Ganto said: *I just have the feeling that you will go to the top of a lonely peak in the future, build yourself a simple hut, and will spread and promote the great teachings. You have these great capabilities, although you are still saying such things.*

Master Seppo said: *My state has not settled peacefully yet, though.*

Master Ganto said: *If you really are like that, tell me the facts according to the state that you have experienced one by one. I will affirm those that are appropriate and scoop out what is not right for you.*

Master Seppo said: *When I went to Master Enkan Sai-an's temple I had the chance to hear the Master preaching Buddhist theory in the Lecture Hall. He preached about the material (form) and the immaterial (emptiness). There I was able to enter the concrete state.*

Master Ganto said: *That is already thirty years ago. I really want to discuss something more relevant.*

Master Seppo said: *Later, I read in Master Tozan's poem of the flowing river, that if you look for something outside of yourself, that attitude can never make you happy. We should avoid making an effort to get something outside of ourselves. I hate that attitude. It is completely foreign to me.*

Master Ganto said: *If you understand the poem like that, you still haven't got through that state.*

Master Seppo said: *Later, I visited Master Tokuzan and asked him whether or not I had got the result of what I had learned about Buddhism in the past. Master Tokuzan struck me once with his stick saying: "What are you saying? At the moment of the present nothing remains. It is like water in a tub with no bottom."*

Master Ganto said loudly: *Don't you remember hearing that something which is always coming and going from the house can never be a family treasure? If you want to spread and strengthen the great teachings, they should emanate from your own breast; using them, you should make yourself one with heaven and earth.*

On hearing this, Master Seppo arrived at the truth, and prostrated himself at once. He stood up and cried repeatedly: *Elder brother! I have realized the truth at Gozan Mountain for the first time.*

Commentary

These three masters, who were also great friends, were traveling around together visiting Buddhist masters. When they reached the Reishu district, Master Kinzan stopped to take up residence in his temple, leaving the other two to travel on together.

Halted by snow at Gozan Mountain, Master Ganto simply slept all day, while Master Seppo spent the time practicing Zazen. Master Seppo was not in a peaceful state, and confessed this fact to his friend. Master Ganto suggested that he help his friend resolve his conflicts. Master Seppo related several instances of when he had experienced the Buddhist state, but these stories were merely memories, and what was important was his state there and then. Master Seppo related his experiences to Master Ganto one by one, and Master Ganto commented.

Although Master Seppo thought that he had transcended the state of aiming for something outside of himself, Master Ganto pointed out that he was still trying to get something. He told Master Seppo that the real treasure exists in ourselves, not in some external aim, and that he should just make himself one with the whole Universe. On hearing these words, Master Seppo realized the truth.

As well as presenting some important Buddhist teachings, this story gives a realistic picture of Buddhist monks traveling around searching for the truth in mediaeval China.

NINETEEN

When Master Kyozan Ejaku was master of Tohei Temple, Master Isan Reiyu sent him a letter along with a mirror.

The package arrived at the temple and Master Kyozan took it with him to the Lecture Hall, held up the mirror and said to his assembly: *Students, Master Isan sent this mirror and it has arrived here. Now I would like you to discuss this for a while. Is this mirror Isan's or is it Tohei's? If you say this mirror is now Tohei's, I will say it is a present from Isan. If you say it was sent from Isan, I will say it is now in the Master of Tohei's hand. If you can show me the truth I will keep the mirror, if you cannot show me anything I will smash the mirror at once.*

He repeated this three times. None of the assembly could answer, so the Master smashed the mirror into pieces.

Commentary

When Master Kyozan Ejaku received a letter and mirror from Master Isan he used it to test his disciples on the difference between a subjective viewpoint and an objective viewpoint. He asked his disciples whether the mirror belonged to Isan or Tohei.

If we think about the situation objectively the mirror is now Tohei's, but if we think of it abstractly the mirror was a present from Master Isan. Master Kyozan asked his disciples to show him what the real situation was, but no one could reply, so in the end he smashed the mirror.

Reality is neither objective nor subjective. Smashing the mirror, even though a somewhat melodramatic action, was Master Kyozan's real act in the present moment.

TWENTY

One day Master Tozan Ryokai and Master Shinzan Somitsu arrived at the temple of Master Hokugan Myotetsu. Master Hokugan asked the two Zen monks: *Where have you come from?*

Master Tozan said: *From south of the lake.*

The Master said: *What is the family name of the government official who is in control of the temples there?*

Master Tozan said: *I cannot remember his family name.*

Master Hokugan said: *What is his first name?*

Master Tozan said: *I cannot remember his first name either.*

Master Hokugan asked: *Does he manage things well?*

Master Tozan said: *There is a curtain outside of his room, naturally.*

Master Hokugan said: *Can you pass in and out through it?*

Master Tozan said: *We do not go in and out.*

Master Hokugan said: *Why do you not go in and out through it?*

Master Tozan left the room swinging his long sleeves.

The next day Master Hokugan entered the Zazen Hall very early in the morning. He called to the two experienced monks to come up to him and said: *I am an old monk, and what you two experienced monks answered to my questions yesterday does not satisfy me, so I was troubled throughout the night. Now I would like to ask you to say something that will change my state. If your words make me feel satisfied, then I would like to prepare breakfast at once and live with you throughout the summer retreat.*

Master Tozan said: *Master, please ask us again.*

Master Hokugan said: *Why do you not pass in and out (through the curtain)?*

Master Tozan said: *Because we live a great and valuable life.*

Master Hokugan prepared breakfast at once and they lived together throughout the summer retreat.

Commentary

When Master Hokugan asked Master Tozan and Master Shinzan the name of the government official who controlled the temples in the area where they lived, they showed absolutely no interest in giving him the information. Master Tozan seemed to have no interest in the duties of the official, and left swinging his sleeves; that is, expressing his disapproval.

Master Hokugan thought that this attitude was strange, because all temples at that time were controlled by the government, so the relationship with the official should have been important to the temples.

This reaction from the two monks troubled Master Hokugan during the night, so the next morning he asked them to explain. Master Tozan answered: *"Because we live a great and valuable life."* These words expressed Master Tozan's state. He knew what was truly important in Buddhism and what was not.

Master Hokugan was struck by these words and agreed to spend the summer retreat with the two monks.

TWENTY-ONE

Quoting:

One day a monk asked Master Kyuho Doken: *I heard that you, Master, said "Even though many saints manifested themselves again and again, they are all simply people who were transmitted by words." Is that true?*

The Master said: *It is true.*

The monk said: *What about Gautama Buddha, of whom it is said that when he was born in this world, he pointed to heaven and earth and said, "Throughout heaven and earth, only I am revered." How can you say that he is a person who is only transmitted by words?*

The Master said: *It is just because we hear that he pointed to the heavens and the earth that I call him a man who is only transmitted by words.*

Commentary

A monk asked Master Kyuho if he had said that the many Buddhist saints in the past were only "*persons transmitting words*." Master Kyuho said that it was indeed true. The monk was taken aback, and asked whether the master also thought that Gautama Buddha himself, the greatest of human beings, was also only "*a person transmitting words*." He felt that Gautama Buddha was a concrete historical person who suffered much, and who, after laborious practice, attained the truth.

Master Kyuho meant that the stories or images that come to us from the past in words, are just that; mere words. Those words cannot capture the nature of a real person standing in front of us. For this reason, he said that even our image of Gautama Buddha is transmitted to us only in words.

The point of this story rests on the phrase used in the original for "*people only transmitting words*" (*den-go no hito*: literally, a transmit-word person). The phrase can be interpreted in either an active or a passive meaning. In its active meaning, it suggests that the ancients were "*only transmitting words*" and nothing else, and this is the interpretation that the monk gives to the story.

Read in the passive form, and this is Master Kyuho's meaning, it means that the knowledge we have of these real people of the past is "*only transmitted by words*," and therefore does not contain that which actually makes the person themselves; their real presence in front of us.

Buddhism makes a distinction between a real person here and now, and an impression of the person transmitted by words. In the modern world, we are constantly confronted by audio and video images of people who we come to believe that we know simply on the basis of their images.

TWENTY-TWO

Concerning Master Tanshu Ryuzan:

Master Tozan and Master Shinzan were traveling together, when they saw a vegetable leaf floating down the valley stream.

Master Tozan said: *In these mountains there must be someone who practices Buddhism.*

Then they went to look for a hut and the master who must be living there.

Master Ryuzan asked: *There are no paths on this mountain. Where have you two Zen travelers come from?*

Master Tozan said: *Forgetting about the fact that the mountain does not have any paths for a while, Master, from where did you come to live on this mountain?*

The Master said: *I haven't just appeared out of the clouds or water!*

Master Tozan asked: *How long has it been since you came to live here, Master?*

The Master said: *I never concern myself with the passing springs and autumns.*

Master Tozan said: *Did the Master live here first or did the mountain live here first?*

The Master said: *I don't know.*

Master Tozan asked: *Why don't you know?*

The Master said: *I haven't come here for human beings or for the gods in heaven.*

Master Tozan asked further: *What motivated you to come to live here on this mountain?*

The Master said: *I saw two bulls made of mud fighting against each other walk into the sea. I have arrived at reality now, and I do not know where the two bulls are.*

Commentary

On their travels in search of Buddhist teachings, Master Tozan and Master Shinzan noticed a vegetable leaf floating down a stream, and guessed that a Buddhist practitioner must be living in the remote mountains further upstream. They went in search of a hut. Finding the hut, they met its owner, Master Ryuzan.

Master Tozan asked the Master about his life in these mountains. Why had he gone to live in such a remote spot, where there weren't even any paths? The Master's replies were enigmatic. He was just there. He didn't care how long he had been there, or why he had come. He hadn't come in search of human beings or gods.

He said that in his earlier life, two bulls made of mud were always fighting against each other inside him. These bulls represent our inner conflicts that destroy our peace of mind. As a result of his Buddhist practice, they had wandered off into the sea and dissolved.

From that time, Master Ryuzan was always living in reality in the moment of the present. He did not know what had happened to his conflicts of the past. He was just enjoying his peaceful life in the mountains.

TWENTY-THREE

Master Nangaku Ejo, hearing that Master Baso Doitsu had begun teaching in the Kosei district asked his disciples: *Is Doitsu preaching Buddhism to people?*

The monks said that he had indeed started preaching. The Master instructed a monk to go to Master Doitsu's temple and wait for him to go to the Lecture Hall to start preaching, and then ask him: *"How are you getting on?"* He said the monk should remember Master Baso's reply and bring it to him.

The monk went there, following his master's instructions exactly, and returned.

The monk reported to his Master: *Master Baso said, "After being confused for these thirty years, at no time have I suffered from a lack of salt or soy sauce."*

Master Nangaku affirmed Master Baso's reply.

Master Daiei Soko in Kinzan took up these words at a later time, and said: *I, Unmon would not say that. I would say that the dream I had last night was not ominous, so I would like to write the character for Great Happiness on the gate.*

Commentary

Master Baso said that although living in confusion (suggesting the complicated situations that make up our real life) in the last thirty years, he had never been in a situation where he could not continue with his life. Basically he was happy and at peace with himself. Master Nangaku Ejo affirmed Master Baso's words.

On hearing this story at a later time, Master Daiei Soko, who became a famous proponent of the type of Zazen that uses koans, and who formerly went by the name of Unmon, said that he had something better to say; because he didn't have a bad dream last night, he would write the character for happiness on the temple gate.

In Master Baso's words we can recognize that, although he was not in such a wonderful situation, his life was continuing on in a peaceful way. From Master Daiei's words, we can guess that he was a rather critical and overly intellectual person.

TWENTY-FOUR

National Master Enkan Sai-an asked a *Zasu* (temple master): *What kind of sutras and commentaries have you studied?*

The *Zasu* said: *The Garland Sutra.*

Then Master Enkan said: *How many kinds of real worlds are described in that sutra?*

The *Zasu* said: *To be succinct, there are four kinds, and in a wider sense there are limitlessly many worlds that are increasing all the time.*

Master Enkan stood his *hossu* up vertically and said: *What kind of world includes this?*

The *Zasu* just sat there for some time.

Master Enkan said: *Knowledge that comes from thinking and understanding that comes from consideration are nothing more than wild dancing in a demon's cave. A single candle in the daylight loses its brightness at once. Off with you!*

Commentary

The *Zasu* belonged to a rather philosophical Buddhist sect, and had been studying the Garland Sutra. He knew all about the four kinds of worlds and other innumerable worlds from his theoretical studies. However, when Master Enkan stood up his *hossu* (ceremonial fly whisk) and asked about this real world in front of him in which the *hossu* exists, the *Zasu* had no reply. He could not relate the worlds he had studied in the Garland Sutra with the real world.

Master Enkan pointed out to him the limited nature of intellectual knowledge, saying that even someone who is brilliant intellectually can lose all their brilliance when confronted by reality, which exists here and now, outside of the intellectual area.

TWENTY-FIVE

One day a monk asked Master Tozan: *When we are actually surrounded by cold or heat, how can we avoid them?*

Master Tozan said: *Why not go to the place where there is no cold or heat?*

The monk said: *How exactly can we get to this place where there is no cold or heat?*

Master Tozan said: *When it is cold, kill yourself with cold, and when it is hot, kill yourself with heat.*

Commentary

The monk asked how he could cope with cold and heat in his real day-to-day life. In the unheated temples of China and Japan, the winters can be very cold, and the summers very hot and humid. Master Tozan suggested that he go to the place where there is no cold or heat. By this he meant to stop trying to get away from cold and heat, and just endure the way things are.

The monk wanted a more concrete explanation, and asked where this place without cold or heat might be. Master Tozan explained that he was not talking about a place, but about an attitude, in which we do not try to separate ourselves from the circumstances, but throw ourselves in completely – abandon or “kill” ourselves with cold or heat.

To stop holding on to what we would prefer, and accept that it is cold or hot is to become one with our surroundings. Although this advice sounds rather severe, in the real situation it is effective.

TWENTY-SIX

One day a monk came to say goodbye to Master Soju.

The Master said: *When you arrive in some other district, how will you answer someone who asks you how I, an old monk, present Gautama Buddha's teachings in this temple.*

The monk said: *When someone actually asks me the question, I will say whatever I say.*

The Master said: *Where is there a Buddhist who does not have a mouth?*

The monk said: *Well, it is difficult to be a Buddhist who does not have a mouth.*

The Master held up his *hossu* and said: *Can you see this?*

The monk said: *Where is there a Buddhist who does not have eyes?*

The Master said: *Truly, to be a Buddhist who has no eyes is really difficult.*

The monk walked around the Master's Zazen seat and started to leave the room.

The Master said: *You have replied to my question well.*

Then the monk cried *Katsu!*

The Master said: *I, an old monk, do not know you.*

The monk said: *What use is it to want to know me?*

The Master then struck the floor of the Zazen Hall three times.

Commentary

When Master Soju was saying goodbye to a monk who was about to leave his temple, he asked the monk how he would describe his Master's way of teaching. The monk refused to answer this hypothetical question, believing that the real situation would present an answer when the time came. To talk about it now would simply be an abstract discussion. The Master was not happy with this answer, as it seemed to be a somewhat over-confident response that denied the real situation.

When asked a question, it is normal to answer. However, the monk came back with another quick answer – we all have a mouth. At these clever words, the Master held up his *hossu* and asked the monk if he could see it; in other words, whether the monk could see the reality that was in front of him.

The monk replied that all Buddhists have eyes, so he could certainly see reality. The Master affirmed the monk's answer, at which he walked around the Zazen chair to express his thanks and started to leave the room.

The Master felt that the monk had understood his teachings well, and told the monk, who replied with a shout of superiority. The Master replied that he didn't know the monk, in the sense that he couldn't recognize the monk's mental state just from his shout of *Katsu!*

The monk replied that someone in the Buddhist state cannot be captured by a name or by a mental image. At this the Master became satisfied with the monk's state and struck the floor three times in affirmation.

TWENTY-SEVEN

A government officer asked Master Rozan Seiken: *We occupied the city of Kinryo and our troops spread out and killed untold numbers of people. Were those actions sinful or not?*

Master Seiken replied: *I, an old monk, am just watching these situations in reality.*

Commentary

As Buddhists, we take a precept not to destroy life. The government officer was worried, since his position involved him in ordering the killing of many people, that his actions were sinful. Of course, if we judge his conduct, he committed many sins, but he was unable to avoid this in carrying out his duty.

Master Seiken recognized the difficult circumstances of the officer's life, and so he wouldn't say that his actions were sins. He just said he was always watching reality. In reality it is difficult at times to categorize the conduct of others as good or bad.

Reality is very severe. Master Seiken recognized that the officer's life was in reality very severe, so he said that he himself was just watching the real situation. In reality, situations are usually complex, and we must recognize the existence of such a fact. It is sometimes difficult to criticize or affirm.

If we see a snake crawling toward a baby and we are too concerned with following the precepts exactly, we may hesitate too long to save the baby. At the moment of the present, we must be free – even from the precepts – to act as the circumstances demand.

TWENTY-EIGHT

Master Tozan asked Master Ungan Donjo: *After your death, if someone asks whether I have got my Master's truth or not, how should I answer them?*

Master Ungan said: *Say "It is just this."*

Master Tozan stayed silent for a while.

Master Ungan said: *Acarya Ryokai, if you want to realize this matter through experience, you have to study diligently in detail.*

Master Tozan couldn't say anything. Master Ungan struck him at once.

[After Master Ungan's death,] when Master Tozan served offerings to Master Ungan's image, a monk asked him: *The late Master said "It is just this." What do these words mean?*

Master Tozan said: *I could not understand what the words meant at that time.*

The monk said: *I don't understand whether or not the late Master knew what real existence was.*

Master Tozan said: *If he hadn't known something, he wouldn't have known how to speak about the ineffable. Because he knew something, he was able to express the ineffable somehow.*

Commentary

Master Tozan wanted to know how to express the truth of Buddhism to his future students. Master Ungan replied that the truth of Buddhism is nothing other than what is in front of us at this moment – just this! Master Tozan's silence suggests that he did not fully understand what his Master meant, and so he was advised to study diligently to realize the truth.

After the death of his master, Master Tozan was asked the meaning of this very phrase by a monk. He admitted that he did not understand the meaning of the phrase when his master first uttered it. His reply to the monk shows that he believed that his master knew clearly the truth of Buddhism.

To express the truth of Buddhism in words may be impossible, and if we don't have the Buddhist state, we can never find a way to express the truth. If we have the Buddhist state, we will be able to find some way to try to convey what it is. This is exactly what Master Ungan did. Master Tozan affirmed his master's expression of the truth.

TWENTY-NINE

When Master Rakan Keishin saw a monk coming towards him, he held up his *hossu* at once. The monk prostrated in front of him.

The Master said: *Why did you look at me and then prostrate yourself?*

The monk said: *I expressed my thanks for the Master's teaching.*

Master Keishin struck the monk and said: *When you see me standing with the hossu you give thanks for the master's teaching. Why don't you give thanks when you see me sweeping the ground or the floors every day?*

Commentary

When the monk saw his master hold up a *hossu*, he prostrated himself in reverence. Master Keishin taught the monk that Buddhism is not only reverence, but action in day-to-day life.

If a monk shows thanks when he sees his master standing holding up the *hossu*, he should also prostrate himself when his master is sweeping the ground. From the Buddhist viewpoint, all action is equally valuable.

THIRTY

One day, as Master Isan Reiyu sat in the Lecture Hall, the *Tenzo* (temple cook) struck the wooden fish. The *Kaju* (the monk who tends the fire) threw down his poker and laughed loudly, clapping his hands.

The Master said: *Among my disciples there is a man of the ineffable. Please call him up here – I would like to ask him the reason.*

The *Kaju* said: *Because I haven't eaten breakfast, my stomach feels empty. So I was glad to hear the sound of the wooden fish.*

Master Isan nodded immediately.

Commentary

Master Isan Reiyu noticed the profound Buddhist attitude of the *Kaju*, who laughed loudly when he heard the sound of the wooden fish, signaling that the meal was ready.

Master Isan felt that the *Kaju's* attitude was very straightforward and without intellectual hesitation, and he affirmed his state. When questioned, the *Kaju* did not give a complicated philosophical explanation. He hadn't eaten breakfast, and so he felt hungry. He was glad to hear the sound of the wooden fish.

Master Isan Reiyu affirmed this simple and realistic attitude. To act simply and realistically is the aim of Buddhist practice.

THIRTY-ONE

Quoting:

Master Unmon preached to the assembly: *Although you may feel that you haven't entered the Buddhist state yet, you are standing right on all the buddhas of the past, present, and future, and the teachings of the Buddha throughout his life are on the tip of your tongue.*

In the end, you just need to enter reality, which is very complicated.

Commentary

In Buddhist circles, practitioners often feel that they have not yet attained the state of buddha, or not yet realized the truth, and so limit themselves by their perception of their state.

Master Unmon says that when we feel like this, we miss the fact that we are standing on the ground, we are actually living in the middle of reality. And to live in the middle of reality is the state of buddha.

In the end, he says, we need to act, to enter the complicated nature of day-to-day life itself. Rather than feel that we are not good enough to talk about Buddhism, we can open our mouths and talk.

Master Unmon is encouraging us to act, to enter reality itself, rather than to imagine that there is something that we have not yet attained.

THIRTY-TWO

Master Sekito preached to an assembly: *There are no hindrances in speech or behavior.*

Master Yakusan Igen said: *Things that are not speech or behavior do not have any hindrances either.*

Master Sekito said: *In this place where I exist now, even the point of a needle cannot enter.*

Master Yakusan said: *At the place where I exist now, it is like planting flowers on a stone.*

Commentary

Master Sekito described his usual state; he said that he felt no hindrances in either speech or behavior in his day-to-day life, and so he could live very freely.

Master Yakusan added that, for him, not only speech and behavior, but all things and phenomena are free from hindrance. Master Sekito then described his state more exactly. He said that he is so fully in reality, that there is no room left, even for the point of a needle to enter.

Master Yakusan then described his state as like planting a flower, which needs soil, on a stone, which is bare. Reality is bare and direct, and has nothing superfluous.

In this story, Master Sekito expressed himself rather exactly and a little intellectually, and Master Yakusan expressed himself in a more inclusive and balanced way. These differences come from their individual attitudes and characters.

THIRTY-THREE

A monk arrived at Master Joshu's temple. The Master asked: *Have you been here before?*

The monk said: *Yes, I have.*

The Master said: *Please have a cup of tea.*

On a later occasion, Master Joshu asked another monk: *Have you ever been here before?*

The monk said: *No, I haven't.*

The Master said: *Please have a cup of tea.*

The *Inshu* (head of the temple office) asked: *Leaving aside the case of the monk who had been here before, why did you say to the monk who hadn't been here before "please have a cup of tea"?*

The Master called the *Inshu* by name and the *Inshu* replied.

The Master said: *Please have a cup of tea.*

Commentary

Master Joshu showed the same attitude, and spoke the same words, both to the monk who had been to his temple before, and to the monk who had not. The *Inshu* thought that, because the situation was different, the Master's attitude should have been different.

The Master wanted to demonstrate something real to the *Inshu*, so he called him by name. The *Inshu* replied. It is natural to reply when someone calls you.

The Master then answered with the same words that he had used in both the previous situations. We meet many different situations in reality, but sometimes we can use the same words, and show the same attitude, in various circumstances. This simple fact is what Master Joshu wanted to show to the *Inshu*.

THIRTY-FOUR

Concerning Shin Daichu of Chosa City:

One day, when Master Sansho Enen was in the order of Master Chosa Keishin, he told Acarya Shu to ask this question to the Master: *"After Master Nansen dies, where will you go?"*

To this question, Master Keishin replied: *When Sekito was a novice he became a disciple of the Sixth Patriarch, Master Daikan Eno.*

Acarya Shu said: *I did not ask you whether Master Sekito became a disciple of the Sixth Patriarch. After Master Nansen dies where will you go?*

Master Keishin said: *Master Daikan Eno told Master Sekito Kisen to visit Master Seigen Gyoshi.*

Acarya Shu said: *Even though you have talked about pine trees which are thousands of feet in height, you do not have the state of a young bamboo shoot.*

The Master remained silent.

Acarya Shu told this to Master Sansho.

Master Sansho said: *If he really expressed himself like that, he is superior to Master Rinzai by more than seven steps. Even so, I will test him. I will wait until tomorrow and then test him further.*

Master Sansho himself went to Master Keishin's private room and said: *Master, your answers yesterday are to be esteemed; there have never been and will never again be such splendid words!*

The Master didn't reply.

Master Sansho said: *I have always thought that this is no ordinary monk!*

Commentary

Master Sansho Enen wanted to test Master Chosa Keishin (Shin Daichu or "Tiger Shin" was his nickname), so he told Acarya Shu to ask Master Keishin where he would go after Master Nansen Fugan dies. Master Keishin did not answer directly, but quoted the example of Master Sekito Kisen who was a disciple of the Sixth Patriarch.

Acarya Shu did not see what the Master meant, and so questioned him again. Master Keishin continued with his example of what happened to Master Sekito.

The reason why Master Keishin did not speak about himself directly is that in Buddhism, we act according to the circumstances at the time, and he would do the same. And the example of Master Sekito was the same – all Buddhist masters act in this way. However, Acarya Shu felt Master Keishin's answer was a rebuff to his question.

Although the Master's reply was as profound as tall pine trees, he felt the Master was rather cold and grand, and not at all soft and gentle, so he used the simile of a young bamboo shoot, which is very soft and flexible. Master Keishin didn't reply to the criticism.

Acarya Shu told Master Sansho what had happened. Master Sansho felt that Master Keishin's answer was really excellent, and yet he wanted to go and confirm something for himself. On visiting the Master to praise his answer, Master Sansho confirmed for himself that his master was no ordinary man, but a great master. These same words were used by Master Rinzai in praising Master Chinshu Fuke (*see Book 1, No. 22*).

THIRTY-FIVE

When she was twelve years old, Tei Jusanjo followed her elder sister, who was a nun, to visit Master Isan Reiyu. Just after the elder nun had stood up after her prostration, Master Isan asked: *Elder sister nun, where are you living now?*

The nun said: *I live near the Nandai-ko River.*

Master Isan shouted *Katsu!* at once, and made her leave.

Then he asked: *Old woman behind, where are you living now?*

Jusanjo approached the Master without any anxiety, and stood there in *shashu*. Master Isan asked again.

The young woman said: *I have expressed my answer to you already, Master.*

Master Isan said: *Leave here.*

Just after the Master had got down from his (Zazen) seat and gone to the Lecture Hall, the elder sister nun said: *Jusanjo, you usually say that I understand Zen. Even though your mouth is so fast and clever, today when the great Master asked you something, you couldn't reply!*

The young woman said: *It is very disappointing to hear you say such a thing, and at the same time you say that I should travel in pursuit of Buddhism. I would like to cast off my Buddhist clothes and keep them to give to my daughter.*

The young woman told the story to Master Razan later and said: *Me as a young woman meeting Master Isan and showing that attitude; do you think that my conduct was appropriate and polite?*

Master Razan said: *I cannot say there was no mistake.*

The young woman said: *Where is the mistake?*

Master Razan scolded her.

The young woman said: *You put flowers on brocade.*

Commentary

Tei Jusanjo was famous, even as a young woman, because she was excellent in studying Buddhism. Tei was her family name, and Jusanjo means young

woman of thirteen. When she was twelve years old she followed her elder sister nun to Master Isan's temple.

When asked by Master Isan where she was living, the older nun gave a concrete reply, not realizing that the Master was really asking about her Buddhist state. The phrase where are you living now, or where are you now was often used in Buddhism in China to mean what is your state now? The Master was not satisfied with the older nun's reply and asked her to leave. Then he noticed the young woman who had been standing behind her, and asked her the same question, ironically called her "*Old woman.*"

Jusanjo understood what the Master was asking, and stood peacefully with her hands clasped in *shashu*, to show that she had the Buddhist state. The Master asked her a second time, and she explained her response. The Master felt that such a response (*I have already told you...*) in one so young was a little rude, so he asked her to leave.

The older nun had not understood and criticized Jusanjo for not replying to the Master's question, which disappointed Jusanjo. She felt like throwing away her Buddhist clothes in disgust at the older nun's stupidity.

Later, Jusanjo recounted the story to Master Razan Dokan, and asked what he thought of her conduct. He said that she had been a little rude in addressing the Master. Jusanjo felt this difficult to accept, so Master Razan scolded her. On hearing this, Jusanjo realized that she had been somewhat rude, and agreed with Master Razan's assessment by saying that he had added something beautiful (flowers) to something already beautiful (brocade).

THIRTY-SIX

Master Shokei in the Shoshu district said to his assembly: *About to take one step, we become confused by thoughts. About to step back, instantly we lose the facts. Standing without moving, we are like an inanimate object.*

Then a monk asked him: *How can I avoid being an inanimate object?*

The Master said: *Move, change direction, act.*

The monk said: *How can I avoid being confused by thoughts, or losing the facts?*

The Master said: *Step forward, step backward.*

The monk prostrated (to show that he had understood).

The Master said: *There is a person who has ascended and has understood like this, but this old monk does not affirm whether he has understood or not.*

The monk said: *Please show me directly, Master.*

Without more ado, the Master hit him and turned him out.

Commentary

Master Shoshu Shokei explained how difficult it is to act. When we have the intention to do something our mind becomes full of ideas and alternatives, and we are sometimes confused and find it difficult to move forward.

If we decide to hold back and not to do anything, we often miss the right time to act, losing sight of the circumstances, and missing the chance. If we do nothing, we are no different from an inanimate object.

The monk asked how he could avoid being like an inanimate object. The Master told him to do something, to act. The monk asked again how to avoid being confused by ideas, or losing sight of the facts, to which the Master replied that he should simply act; just doing something changes both our own state and the circumstances. The monk thanked the Master for his teaching and showed that he had understood by prostrating himself.

Master Shokei did not affirm the monk's attitude completely. Although the monk had understood his Master's words, the Master had some doubt as to whether the monk could put them into practice.

When the monk asked Master Shokei to teach him more directly, he hit the monk and turned him out. This was his final teaching. Such direct and concrete behavior showed the monk what real action is.

THIRTY-SEVEN

Master Seigen Gyoshi asked Great Master Daikan Eno: *What kind of work doesn't fall into discrimination?*

Master Daikan Eno said: *What work have you done before?*

Master Sekito said: *I have no experience of the sacred.*

Master Daikan Eno said: *Then how can you fall into discrimination?*

Master Seigen said: *I do not have any sacred experiences. How can there be discrimination?*

Master Daikan Eno said: *Just so, just so. You should guard and maintain it well.*

Commentary

Master Seigen Gyoshi asked Master Daikan Eno how to avoid discrimination between the secular and the sacred. So Master Daikan asked Master Seigen how he had handled his life up to that time. Master Seigen said that he had no experience of anything he could call sacred. In that case, replied Master Daikan Eno, he did not have any discrimination.

Master Seigen affirmed that he had no experience of anything that can be called sacred, and so no discrimination existed for him. Master Daikan Eno, the Sixth Patriarch, affirmed this reply as being the Buddhist state; no discrimination between everyday life and Buddhist life. They are the same.

THIRTY-EIGHT

Master Chimon Shikan was returning to the temple after taking a walk in the mountains. The head monk and a crowd of other monks came out to meet the Master returning on his own. The head monk said: *Master, your walk in the mountains must have been hard, and you may have experienced difficulties.*

The Master held up his walking stick and said: *All my energy comes from this stick!*

At this, the head monk stepped forward, snatched the stick away, and threw it into the corner.

The Master fell over (as if all the energy has drained from his body).

The crowd of monks rushed forward to help the Master to his feet. The Master picked up the stick and ran off. Then stopping and turning to face his assistant, he said: *All my energy comes from this stick!*

Commentary

Master Chimon (Sosen) Shikan indicated that he got all his energy from his walking stick, but the head monk criticized his Master's reliance on something else, and snatched away his Master's stick. The Master then pretended to fall over since his source of energy had gone. After the other monks had given him back his stick, he affirmed again that his energy came from the stick.

This story shows a Buddhist Master and his disciples in day-to-day life. The Master and monks were fooling around. Even in their play, they represented the Buddhist attitude.

THIRTY-NINE

Master Joshu preached to an assembly: *Elder and younger brothers! If someone arrives from the Southern District we help him to unload his baggage and if someone arrives from the Northern District we help him load up his baggage. Sometimes, when we approach someone who is more experienced than us and ask the truth we lose the truth, and sometimes when we approach someone who is less experienced than us and ask them the truth we get the truth. Elder and younger brothers! If a right man preaches wrong teachings, the wrong teachings will become right, and if a wrong man preaches right teachings, they will become wrong as a result. There are many masters in many directions, but it is difficult to see their truth, although in reality we can experience it. However in this temple, people can see and hear the truth of my teachings in front of them. But even so, it is difficult for them to realize the truth for themselves.*

Commentary

Master Joshu described the fact that all situations are different. In China at that time, the Southern District was where the majority of goods were produced. People traveled from the South to the North carrying goods. Many people would come from the North to buy and load up with goods for the return journey.

Master Joshu said that in the North, we help people arriving from the South in one way, and in the South, we help people leaving for the North in another way. Each situation is different.

He then gave another example. Sometimes we find that we are only confused by advice sought from more experienced practitioners, and find the answer we are seeking from someone less experienced than ourselves. Again, each situation is different.

He described the same situation existed concerning Buddhist teachings. In many temples, the masters did not teach Buddhism, so although the truth is everywhere around us, it was not clear what they were teaching. The situation in Master Joshu's temple was different. Although his teachings were easy to hear and understand, making them real – actually living Buddhism – is difficult.

FORTY

One day Master Joshu preached to an assembly: *It is as if we held a bright pearl in our hands. When a foreigner appears, the foreigner is manifested. When a Chinese person appears, the Chinese person is manifested. I take a stalk of grass and make a sixteen foot golden figure for my use. I take a sixteen foot golden figure and make a stalk of grass for my use.*

Commentary

Master Joshu used the bright pearl as a metaphor for our real Buddhist life. The bright pearl is always in our hand, just as Gautama Buddha's teachings are always with us. Gautama Buddha's teachings are reality itself.

Master Joshu expressed reality with the words, "*When a foreigner appears...*" and "*When a Chinese person appears...*" This reality manifests itself directly in the bright pearl of the Buddha's teachings.

Master Joshu then explained the fundamental character of his real life. The stalk of grass represents the material aspect of life. Gautama Buddha's golden figure represents Buddhist understanding. His words suggest that by relying on matter we can find religious value. The last sentence means that religious value is always a part of his day-to-day life.

FORTY-ONE

Quoting:

One day a monk bowed down in front of Master Kimpo Jushi.

The Master grabbed the monk and said: *It is not easy to get the truth of Ascendant Human Beings. There is one story I would like to tell you which is a precedent.*

The monk took up a listening posture.

The Master slapped the monk with his hand.

The monk said: *Why did you slap me?*

The Master said: *I expect this speech to spread throughout the world.*

Commentary

In the Shobogenzo there is a chapter called *The Matter of the Ascendant State of Buddha*. In this story Master Kimpo Jushi taught the truth of Ascendant Human Beings. The two concepts are related. Ascending Buddhas refers to those who continue their daily life after attaining the truth.

The Master wanted to tell the monk about real buddhas who are diligent in their day-to-day lives. The monk was expecting to hear his Master's preaching, but instead he received a slap in the face.

The Master wanted the monk to wake up to the reality of his life. He demonstrated that Buddhism is as real as a slap in the face. The Master expected the realization of reality to spread throughout the world.

FORTY-TWO

One day, as Master Gensa was preaching, he heard the sound of swallows and said: *They speak profoundly of the real form of this world and preach the essence of the teachings well.*

Then he stepped down from the lecture seat.

There was one monk who asked for the Master's further teachings saying: *I cannot understand.*

The Master said: *Go away. No-one can believe that you do not understand.*

Commentary

In the sound of the swallows Master Gensa heard the real form of this world and the essence of the teachings. When one of the monks claimed that he could not understand, the Master refused to believe him.

Gautama Buddha's teachings are simple obvious facts like the twittering of birds. Everyone can see and hear them, but no one can capture them in words.

The Master told the monk to go away. He wanted the monk to perceive the simple fact of reality; a reality that is clear and present in each moment.

Master Dogen discusses this point in detail in *Shobogenzo Shoho Jisso (All Dharmas Are Real Form)*.

FORTY-THREE

One day Master Taiyo Kyogen asked Master Ryozan Enkan: *What is the training place of the truth that has no form?*

Pointing at a picture on the wall, Master Ryozan said: *This is just a picture by Layman Go.*

Master Kyogen wanted to say something.

Suddenly Master Ryozan grabbed Master Kyogen and said: *This is just on the level of form. What is on the level of no form?*

Hearing these words, Master Kyogen attained the truth. Then going back to his own seat, he just stood there.

Master Ryozan said: *Why don't you say something?*

Master Kyogen said: *I am not refusing to say something, but I am afraid that my words will be written down on paper with a brush and left for future ages.*

Commentary

Master Taiyo Kyogen is referred to in the original as Taiyo Myoan Osho, his posthumous name. Kyogen was the name he used while living.

Master Ryozan pointed to a picture on the wall to clarify the meaning of *"the training place of Buddhism that has no form."* The picture was a real object. The training place of Buddhist truth that has no form is reality itself. Kyogen did not understand clearly, so the Master grabbed him and said, *"This is form – what is no form?"* The Master's question suggests that in reality there is no difference between form and no form.

Reality is one and it is before us in the present moment. Master Kyogen understood his Master's teachings, but he was reluctant to put them into words for fear that they might mislead future generations.

FORTY-FOUR

Master Kyogen Chikan preached and said: *A man is hanging from the branch of a tree on a cliff by his teeth, so that he cannot climb with his hands, and his legs can find no foothold. At that time someone asks him what Bodhidharma's intention was in coming from the West. If he answers the question he will lose his body and life. If he does not answer, he will have been unable to answer a sincere question. So what should he do just at that moment?*

Then a senior monk called Koto stepped forward and said: *I do not want to talk about the case where a man is hanging from a tree. I would like to hear the Master's opinion on the case of a man who is not hanging from a tree.*

The Master laughed loudly.

Commentary

The senior monk thought that it was not necessary to discuss Buddhism under special circumstances. Buddhism is the common everyday situation. The monk wanted to know the Master's teachings regarding this real situation at the present moment.

The Master showed his approval of the monk's criticism with his vigorous laughter.

FORTY-FIVE

Master Mayoku Hotetsu asked Master Rinzai Gigen: *Among Benevolent Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara's thousands of hands and eyes, which are the true eyes?*

Master Rinzai asked: *Among Benevolent Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara's thousands of hands and eyes, which are true eyes? Answer quickly! Answer quickly!*

Master Mayoku pulled Master Rinzai from his preaching seat and sat there himself.

Master Rinzai stood up and said: *That's not so clear!*

Master Mayoku seemed unsure of himself. At this, Master Rinzai pulled Master Mayoku off the Zazen seat and sat there himself again.

Master Mayoku left immediately.

Commentary

The true eyes of Avalokitesvara (the Bodhisattva of Mercy) suggests the true teachings of Gautama. The monk wanted to ask about these teachings, but Master Rinzai just repeated the question. This was intended as a criticism of the original question, which Master Rinzai felt was too abstract.

Master Mayoku thought that Master Rinzai could not answer the question and so he forcibly took Master Rinzai's place.

When Master Rinzai said that it wasn't so clear, Master Mayoku became unsure of himself. Seeing this, Master Rinzai once again took his rightful place and Master Mayoku left the hall.

The two Masters here were discussing real Buddhism – which is different from some kind of intellectual understanding. Their behavior was very direct, and in this way they trained themselves to realize true Buddhist virtues.

FORTY-SIX

When he was asked a question, Master Gutei usually held up one finger.

There was a certain novice and, one day, a secular man asked him: *What kind of Buddhist preaching does your Master preach?*

The novice held up one finger.

Hearing this, the Master cut off the end of the novice's finger with a sword. The novice cried out loudly in terrible pain and started to leave. The Master called the novice back. The novice turned his head. The Master held up one finger again. The novice suddenly realized the truth.

When the Master was about to die, he said to his many monks: *I got Master Tenryu's "top of the finger Zen." Receiving and using it throughout my life, it can never be exhausted. Do you want to understand it?*

Then, holding up one finger, he died.

Commentary

Master Gutei preached Buddhism through the simple act of holding up a finger. This act was not only a symbol of reality, it was reality itself. The novice imitated the Master's behavior, but his action sprang from the intellect, not from a realization of reality itself.

The Master showed what he thought of this imitation Zen by slicing off the end of the student's finger. The student started to flee in pain and surprise. The Master called him back and silently held up one finger. This was the same act that the student had seen before many times and had tried to imitate, but this time he saw it in a new way. This time he was able to see reality itself.

When the Master was about to die he asked his students if they wanted him to explain the inexhaustible Zen that he had received from his teacher, Master Tenryu. He held up one finger and died. This act was Master Gutei's symbol of Buddhism, his symbol of reality. The most important thing for us is to realize the reality that is expressed in this symbol.

FORTY-SEVEN

One day when Master Kyozan Ejaku was a novice, he began reciting a sutra loudly.

Master Shoshu Nyugen said: *Jakusu, your reciting of the sutras sounds just like crying voices.*

Master Kyozan said: *This is how I am. I do not understand. How about you Master?*

Then Master Nyugen looked around here and there (as if uncertain what to do).

Master Kyozan said: *If you act like that, what is the difference between that and my crying voice?*

Master Nyugen shut up and left.

Commentary

Master Nyugen criticized Master Kyozan for reciting a sutra. Perhaps he felt, like some other Zen monks, that the sutras were a waste of time. Master Kyozan then asked Master Nyugen about his own understanding of Buddhism, but Nyugen appeared uncertain about how he should respond.

Thus Kyozan could find no stability in Nyugen's behavior and said that such behavior was no better than reciting the sutras. Sometimes Buddhists must act independently of the opinions and ideas of others; at other times they should follow circumstances. To transcend independence and dependence is the Buddhist attitude.

FORTY-EIGHT

In his day-to-day life Master Zuigan, in his private room, sometimes called out to himself *Master!*

And then replied to himself: *Yes?*

And said further: *Concentrate your mind and avoid being deceived by others.*

Then he said to himself: *Yes! Yes!*

Commentary

In Buddhism, to become the Master of oneself is everyone's duty. So Master Zuigan called himself "*Master*" when he was in his private room, and then replied to his own question.

This story suggests that to be master of ourselves is important for every person who studies Buddhism. In Master Zuigan's case, so that he would not forget, he called himself "*Master*" every day. The story has a humorous tone, but suggests a fundamental principle of Buddhism

FORTY-NINE

Master Shakkyo Ezo asked Master Seido Chizo: *Do you know how to grasp space or not?*

Master Seido said: *I know how to grasp space.*

Master Shakkyo said: *How do you grasp it?*

Master Seido made a gesture of grasping the air with his hand.

Master Shakkyo said: *You don't know how to grasp space!*

Master Seido said: *Elder brother monk. How do you do it?*

Master Shakkyo grasped Master Seido's nose and pulled it.

Master Seido was hurt and cried out in a loud voice: *It is very rude to pull someone else's nose. However I have become free of all things and matter at once.*

Master Shakkyo said: *You should grasp space directly like this.*

Commentary

Buddhism has a clear philosophy, and Buddhists often discuss philosophical matters. In this story the two masters discussed space. To grasp space, Master Seido grasped the air with his hand.

This behavior suggests that space is not only a concept, but real. To grasp space, our action should also be real. Master Shakkyo's method was even more direct; he pulled Master Seido's nose. And on becoming the object of this violent act, Master Seido realized what space is.

This story also teaches that Buddhist theory is not just concept; it points to reality here and now.

FIFTY

Master Hyakujo Nehan asked Master Nansen Fugan: *Did the many past saints have any state that they did not preach to others?*

Master Nansen said: *That which is different from mind; that which is different from buddha; that which is different from matter.*

Master Hyakujo said: *Have you finished preaching already?*

Master Nansen said: *I am just like this. How about you, Master?*

Master Hyakujo said: *I am not such a reverend Buddhist monk; what do I know of preaching or non-preaching?*

Master Nansen said: *I do not understand!*

Master Hyakujo said: *I have preached everything for you in great detail.*

Commentary

Master Hyakujo Nehan asked Master Nansen Fugan what had not been taught by the many masters of the past. Master Nansen replied that it was not mind, not buddha, and not matter. These words suggest that what was taught by the many masters was reality itself. Master Hyakujo was not satisfied with Master Nansen's answer. His further comment that he was not much of a monk and didn't know about preaching and non-preaching is in fact his way of insisting that Buddhism is beyond both preaching and non-preaching.

Even though Master Nansen did not affirm Master Hyakujo's reply, Master Hyakujo insisted that he had already preached everything that Master Nansen needed to know.

In this story the two masters were discussing the center of Buddhism. Even though each master expressed it in his own way, they were both expressing the same thing.

FIFTY-ONE

Quoting:

One day a monk asked Master Sozan Honjaku: *Do eyebrows and eyes know each other or not?*

Master Sozan said: *They do not know each other.*

The monk said: *Why don't they know each other?*

Master Sozan said: *Because they are at one place together.*

The monk said: *In that case, they are not separate from each other.*

Master Sozan said: *An eyebrow is absolutely not an eye.*

The monk said: *And what about an eye...?*

Master Sozan said: *Just be direct.*

The monk said: *What about eyebrows...?*

Master Sozan said: *Even I, Sozan, have some doubt about it.*

The monk said: *Why do even you, Master, have doubts about it?*

The Master said: *When I do not have doubts, then I am simply direct.*

Commentary

A monk asked Master Sozan a kind of riddle: even though eyes and eyebrows are at the same place, why don't they recognize each other? So Master Sozan taught the monk that he should be more direct and realistic. So the monk asked about the real situation of eyebrows, and the real situation of eyes.

Then Master Sozan said that even he had some doubt about the situation. He said that because he lived in reality he was able to have doubts, but the monk wondered why the Master should have doubts.

The Master replied that sometimes he had doubts and sometimes he lived in reality more directly. This situation was his real state – a realistic state.

FIFTY-TWO

Master Dogo, looking at Master Ungan's discomfort, said: *If we leave this physical body, where can we meet each other?*

Master Ungan said: *I will meet you at the place of non-appearance and non-disappearance.*

Master Dogo said: *Why don't you say that we will meet together at the place that is different from non-appearance and non-disappearance?*

Commentary

The word used in the original for physical body is "*karosu*," which means literally envelope or bag. It was frequently used as a metaphor for the physical body.

Master Dogo saw that Master Ungan looked a little ill and wanted to talk with him about living and dying in order to cheer him up. When Master Dogo said "*If we leave this physical body, where can we meet each other?*" he meant if Master Ungan were to die they would not be able to see each other. Master Ungan replied that they could meet together at the place of non-appearance and non-disappearance. The place of non-appearance and non-disappearance means in reality itself.

Master Dogo took Master Ungan up on his way of explaining the situation. He said they were already in reality, and suggested that they would meet in a place that is different from non-appearance and non-disappearance. Reality is just reality. It is completely different from concepts about reality. Master Ungan's expression was a denial of the concepts "appearance" and "disappearance." Master Dogo's expression was a denial of that denial, which again suggests reality itself.

Master Ungan wanted to throw off his ill feeling with his non-emotional response to Master Dogo's words of comfort, but Master Dogo was able to add something to his explanation of the real situation.

FIFTY-THREE

Master Echiyo asked Master Hogen Bun-eki: *What exactly is a buddha?*

Master Hogen said: *Exactly you, Echiyo.*

Commentary

Master Echiyo, whose formal name was Kisu Sakushin, asked what a buddha is. Master Hogen replied that Echiyo himself was a buddha. Usually, people do not think that they are buddha. They think that only very special people who have completed long years of Buddhist training can become buddha. However, Buddhism says that all people are buddhas.

To recognize that they are buddhas is difficult. So when Master Hogen was asked about buddha by Master Echiyo, he replied – you Echiyo are buddha.

This story illustrates the fundamental Buddhist belief that all living beings are buddhas.

FIFTY-FOUR

One day Gautama Buddha, standing in front of a huge multitude, held up a flower and began twirling it.

Only one person, Mahakasyapa, saw Gautama Buddha's twirling flower and smiled.

Gautama Buddha said: *This is the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, which has been transmitted from buddha to buddha. I transmit it to Mahakasyapa.*

Commentary

This story is quoted from a Buddhist Sutra written in China. Buddhist monks who rely upon the practice of Zazen, look for the origin of the practice in this story. However, as the Sutra was written in China, some monks criticize the story and say that it did not originate in India, and so it cannot be reliable.

In *Shobogenzo Tenborin (Turning the Dharma Wheel)*, Master Dogen insists that, because the story has been discussed by many ancestral patriarchs through the ages, the story has come to represent an authentic Buddhist concept. So he says that it is not important whether the Sutra was written in China or in India. If we can find true Buddhist teachings in a story, that story can be a Buddhist scripture. Relying on such reasoning, Master Dogen revered this story.

Gautama Buddha twirled a flower to suggest what the aim of Buddhism is. Although most of the assembly did not understand, Master Mahakasyapa understood and smiled. So Gautama Buddha transmitted the essence of Buddhism to him.

The essence of Buddhism means the practice of Zazen. And this is the reason why Master Dogen used the name *Shobogenzo* (lit. True-Dharma-Eye Treasury), which suggests the essence of Buddhism, as the title of his major work.

FIFTY-FIVE

One day a monk asked Master Hogen Bun-eki: *I have heard that in your teachings you say that from the fundamental, which does not stay, all things and mental phenomena are established. What is this fundamental that does not stay?*

Master Hogen said: *Form appears from something not physical, and name arises from that which cannot be named.*

Commentary

A monk asked Master Hogen the meaning of the words, "*from the fundamental, which does not stay, all things and mental phenomena are established.*" In particular, he wanted to know what "*the fundamental*" meant.

Master Hogen answered him by saying that form is born from something not physical, and name appears from that which has no name. In other words, physical form always arises in combination with meaning or value, and meaning or value (name) always arises in combination with something physical (form).

The fundamental that does not stay suggests reality itself. And in reality, the physical aspect and the abstract aspect of something are always combined into one: the subject and the object are actually one.

FIFTY-SIX

Master Rinzai, looking at a monk coming towards him, raised his *hossu*. The monk straightway prostrated himself. At this, Master Rinzai immediately struck the monk.

Commentary

Master Rinzai raised his *hossu* (fly whisk) when he saw a monk coming towards him. When the monk saw what the Master did, he immediately prostrated himself, in an attempt to show that he had understood the meaning of the Master's action.

Master Rinzai felt that, although the monk prostrated himself, his action was far from realistic. We can surmise that Master Rinzai was able to recognize some pretense or some form of imitation in the monk's behavior, and so he struck him.

FIFTY-SEVEN

One day a monk asked Master Chosa Keishin: *Is it possible even for a man who is based on the Original to become a buddha, or not?*

Master Chosa said: *You tell me! Do the Emperors of great Tang Dynasty China cut thatch and rice plants, or not?*

The monk said: *What man becomes a buddha?*

The Master said: *This "you" becomes a buddha. Do you realize this or not?*

Commentary

A monk asked Master Chosa Keishin whether even a man of the Original can become a buddha. In this question, a man of the Original is a way of referring to a buddha. The question asks whether a buddha can become a buddha or not. The monk wants to know the exact relationship between a man of the Original and a buddha – a somewhat abstract question.

Master Chosa replied with another question – do the Emperors of China do menial tasks like cutting thatch or cutting rice plants? Of course they don't! The Master wanted to suggest the existence of simple facts.

Then the monk asked what kind of man becomes a buddha – he wanted to know what a buddha is in the final analysis. Master Chosa wanted to show the monk that he himself is buddha; that he himself is a man of the Original.

FIFTY-EIGHT

Master Unmon Bun-en preached to an assembly: *"By listening to sounds Master Kyogen Chikan attained the truth, and by looking at form Master Reiun Shigon made his mind clear." What exactly is attainment of the truth by listening to voices, and what is making the mind clear by looking at form?*

Holding up his hand, Master Unmon said: *Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara comes to buy a rice cake, bringing money with him. But if he throws the rice cake away, it is just a cake after all.*

Commentary

Master Unmon asked what was meant by attaining the truth by listening to sounds and making the mind clear by looking at form – taken from the well-known stories of Master Kyogen who attained the truth when he heard a pebble strike a bamboo stalk, and Master Reiun who attained the truth when he saw the beauty of peach blossoms.

Master Unmon then gave his own explanation. He held up his hand, a common gesture for a Buddhist master about to explain something. He used the metaphor of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara buying a rice cake. Avalokitesvara is a symbol of religious effort used in attaining the truth (making the mind clear), and buying a rice cake with money is a symbol of sight and hearing.

In the metaphor, Avalokitesvara throws the rice cake away; this suggests the separation of religious effort and sense perception. When he throws the rice cake away, it becomes any plain common rice cake that has no significant value or meaning. The story teaches us that religious efforts should not be separated from our practical daily life.

FIFTY-NINE

Master Nansen preached to an assembly: *Bodhisattva Manjusri and Bodhisattva Samantabhadra had a certain view of buddha and a certain view of reality last night. I struck each of them twenty times with my stick and banished them forever to the Twin-peaked Iron Mountain.*

Master Joshu Jushin stepped forward from the assembly and said:
Master! Who should we get to strike you with their stick?

Master Nansen said: *Me, O-Roshi? Where have I made my mistake?*

Master Joshu prostrated himself, and Master Nansen stepped down from the lecture seat.

Commentary

Master Nansen was talking about a dream he had the previous night. He dreamt that Bodhisattva Manjusri and Bodhisattva Samantabhadra had an intellectual view of buddha and an intellectual view of reality in his dream. For this, he struck each one twenty times with his stick and banished them to a legendary mountain. The dream suggests that even Bodhisattva Manjusri and Bodhisattva Samantabhadra must be banished if they have intellectual views of Buddhism and reality.

Then Master Joshu, who was in the assembly stepped out and asked who they should get to strike Master Nansen! This was a criticism of Master Nansen's words: Master Joshu thought that to strike and banish the two revered Bodhisattvas was a violation of Buddhist belief. At the same time, his words contain some confirmation of Master Nansen's innate idea.

At this, Master Nansen asked where he had gone wrong. On hearing his Master's sincere question, Master Joshu recognized that his Master had no doubts in striking the Bodhisattvas and banishing them. This suggests that Master Nansen was completely clear in himself that even revered Bodhisattvas should be banished if they had wrong thoughts.

He also realized that Master Nansen was acknowledging his criticism and that the Master's ability to recognize and acknowledge criticism showed that he was in the state of buddha. This is why Master Joshu prostrated himself in front of his Master.

SIXTY

One day a monk asked Master Eishu Basho: *It is said that we Buddhists do not fall into the many miscellaneous circumstances. Master! Please teach me the meaning directly.*

Master Basho said: *There is a question and here is an answer.*

Commentary

A monk asked the meaning of the words "*Buddhists do not fall into the many miscellaneous circumstances.*" These words mean that Buddhists are always free, and can act independently in all circumstances. This suggests that monks are independent from the external world.

The monk wanted to hear an explanation directly from Master Basho. So Master Basho answered, "*You are asking me a question, and now I am replying.*"

This question and its answer are themselves a demonstration of the meaning of not falling into miscellaneous circumstances. In other words, the situation in which the monk asks a question and the Master gives an answer is just reality itself.

SIXTY-ONE

Quoting:

Master Sozan Honjaku asked a monk: *It is so hot in this season now. Where can we go to escape from it?*

The monk said: *I will escape from it inside a boiling cauldron and in the charcoal embers of the fireplace.*

Master Sozan said: *How can we escape from it in those places?*

The monk said: *Because it is impossible for the manifold agonies to appear there.*

The Master rested in silence.

Commentary

Master Sozan asked his disciple how to escape from the heat of the season. The monk answered that he would escape from the heat by jumping into a cauldron of boiling water or into the still-burning embers of a fire. The monk wanted to say that if we try to escape the heat, it will follow us and we can never avoid it. However, if we endure the discomfort by *jumping into it*, we can overcome the discomfort.

Master Sozan asked for further clarification because he thought that the monk may have been approaching the problem from an intellectual angle. So the monk explained that in the state where we endure the heat without an emotional response, nothing can disturb us. Master Sozan was satisfied with the monk's reply.

SIXTY-TWO

One day a monk asked Master Unmon Bun-en: *How can we avoid wasting even a short time throughout the twenty-four hours of a day?*

The Master said: *To what place are you asking this question?*

The monk said: *I, a student, cannot understand your words. I would like to ask for your preaching.*

Then the Master composed a poem and presented it to the monk:

*Even though I preach for you,
You do not reflect on my words.
Your idea is different from mine.
And if you try to think,
In what eon can you attain the truth?*

Commentary

A monk asked Master Unmon how he could avoid spending even a second of his time in vain throughout the twenty-four hours of the day. Master Unmon thought that the monk's attitude was too intellectual. So he asked him to where he was asking the question. His reply to the monk was to tell him that his thinking was not realistic.

Master Unmon taught the monk that not to waste any time throughout the day is not a matter of intellectual intention, but a matter of our action, our behavior in the real world. So if the monk tried to solve the problem in his mind, he would never be able to find a solution.

SIXTY-THREE

One day Master Sozan Honjaku heard the temple bell ringing and said:
Dong! Dong!

A monk said: *Master, what is it?*

The Master said: *It struck my mind.*

Commentary

Master Sozan heard the temple bell ringing and imitated its sound. This rather puzzled a monk who asked what the matter was.

The Master said that the bell had struck his mind, so he spontaneously imitated the sound. There was nothing to explain – it was just a fact. There was only the Master's spontaneous behavior on hearing the ringing of the temple bell.

SIXTY-FOUR

While a government official called O-Keisho was at work one day, Master Keicho Beiko arrived. The government official picked up a brush and held it up to the Master.

Master Beiko said: *Can you realize space or not?*

Then the government official threw down the brush and went into his house; he did not ask for more of the Master's teachings. Master Beiko was puzzled.

The next day, when the government official was preparing for a tea ceremony with the help of Master Kego Kyujo, Master Kego asked: *What sort of conversation did you have with Master Beiko yesterday that made you not want to see him again?*

The government official said: *A lion bites a man. But a dog from the Kan district chases after a ball of mud.*

Master Beiko, hearing the faint sound of conversation, suddenly appeared and, laughing loudly, said: *I understand, I understand.*

The government official said: *If I said there was no understanding it might not be true. Say something as a test, and I will judge it.*

Master Beiko said: *Please preach for me, government official.*

The government official held one chopstick up.

Master Beiko said: *You ghost of a wild fox!*

The government official said: *This man has arrived at the truth completely.*

Commentary

O-Keisho was a government official whose Buddhist state was known and praised by laymen and masters alike. When he held up the brush to Master Beiko he wanted to suggest the ineffable nature of reality – holding up something was a common method in Chinese Buddhism.

The day after his encounter with Master Beiko he was preparing for a tea ceremony with Master Kego, who asked him what had happened during the conversation with Master Beiko. The government official's reply was a criticism of Master Beiko. He wanted to say that a man of excellence (a lion) pursues

serious things (like biting a man), but a common man pursues the trivial (the ball of mud). He thought that Master Beiko's question about realizing space was too abstract and narrow-minded as far as Buddhist philosophy was concerned.

Master Beiko suddenly appeared and laughing loudly, said that he understood. The government official replied that he did not doubt the existence of Master Beiko's understanding, but he wanted to examine the Master's Buddhist state further. The Master replied by asking the government official to preach for him. So the government official held a chopstick up to suggest the ineffable nature of reality again. On seeing this behavior repeated, Master Beiko called the government official nothing but a wily old fox. The government official ironically agreed with the Master's opinion of him, and affirmed that the Master had arrived at the truth.

Usually in Buddhism, a layman is below a monk in rank, so the story sounds rather unusual in this respect: a layman criticizing a Master's words, and then preaching for the Master. However, Master Beiko did not object. He asked the government official for his teachings instead, because the government official was well-known and respected by another Buddhist master, Master Sozan, at that time. The Master criticized the government official's action of holding a chopstick up because he thought that the symbolic action was too formalized and lacked spontaneity. So Master Beiko also had the power to criticize the government official.

This story, then, is a discussion between an excellent Buddhist layman, and an excellent Buddhist Master. In the end, the layman and the Master each affirmed the other's attainment of the truth.

SIXTY-FIVE

One day, a monk asked Master Ho-o Egu from the Jo district: *It is said that around these red balls of flesh stand walls a thousand feet high. Are these the Master's words or not?*

The Master said: Yes.

Then the monk threw down the Master's Zazen seat.

The Master said: *You! Look at this blind man misbehaving himself!*

The monk was unsure of himself.

The Master struck the monk and expelled him from the temple.

Commentary

A monk asked Master Ho-o whether the words which he had heard – that around these red balls of flesh (our physical bodies) stand walls a thousand feet high – were said by Master Ho-o or not.

The Master affirmed that they were his words, at which the monk threw the Master's Zazen seat onto the floor. He thought that the Master's words revealed a viewpoint that was rather common and limited. He thought that such a common person should not be a Buddhist master.

The Master's response was very calm and stable. He said, look at yourself, you are blind and your behavior is not good. The Master was telling him that disorderly behavior could not be Buddhist behavior. The Master criticized the monk's rude action directly. And this simple and direct response made the monk unsure of himself. Then the Master struck the monk in his state of doubt and sent him out of the temple.

In Buddhism there are monks who think that rude manners and incomprehensible words can be used to express the Buddhist truth. Buddhism does not condone such rash behavior, unless a sincere action truly suits the situation.

SIXTY-SIX

Master Suiryō asked Master Baso Do-itsu: *What was Master Bodhidharma's precise intention in coming from the west?*

Master Baso immediately pushed him over and stood on his chest.

Master Suiryō experienced sudden realization of the truth. Jumping up he came up to Master Baso laughing and clapping his hands. *Wonderful! Splendid! Wonderful and splendid! Hundreds of thousands of states in Zazen, an infinity of fine theories have been seen through in an instant on just one head of hair!*

Master Suiryō then prostrated himself.

Commentary

Master Suiryō (Master Kosho Suiro) asked Master Baso why Master Bodhidharma came to China from India. Master Baso's reply was to push Master Suiryō over and stand with a foot on his chest. Master Baso wanted to show that Master Bodhidharma's conduct was not abstract, but concrete behavior like pushing someone over and standing on them.

At this, Master Suiryō suddenly recognized what the truth is. So he jumped up laughing and came up to Master Baso, saying that he had been able to see through all the theories in the world to the true nature of reality. Then he prostrated himself in front of Master Baso to express his thanks.

In Buddhism there are some Masters whose actions are sometimes violent. This violent behavior always has a profound meaning in Buddhism. Their behavior seems to be rude and rough, but it is not to be confused with rude and rough behavior which has no Buddhist purpose.

In the previous story (65), the monk's behavior was rude because he did not understand. In this story, Master Baso's sudden action was Buddhist instruction itself.

SIXTY-SEVEN

One day, Master Isan Reiyu called the *Inshu* (head of the temple office) and the *Inshu* came.

The Master said: *I called for the Inshu. What is the use of you coming?*

The *Inshu* did not reply.

Another time, the Master asked his assistant to call the first monk. The first monk came.

The Master said: *I called for the first monk. What is the use of you coming?*

The first monk didn't have an answer either.

Commentary

Master Isan Reiyu wanted to teach the difference between a person's name and the person's own innate existence. So he called both the *Inshu* and his first monk, and then denied their presence.

He wanted to show that the titles were different from the innate being of the two persons themselves. In this world, we should recognize the difference between concepts and real entities. This is not easy to do.

This story suggests the importance of recognizing this difference between concepts and the thing itself.

SIXTY-EIGHT

One day Master Hyakujo Ekai asked Master Ungan Donjo: *Master! You are always diligent in your day-to-day life. For whom do you work?*

Master Hyakujo said: *There is one who needs me to do it.*

Master Ungan said: *Why do you not make him do it for himself?*

The Master said: *Then I would have no work to do.*

Commentary

Master Ungan Donjo asked Master Hyakujo Ekai why he was so diligent in his day-to-day life. Master Hyakujo replied that his work was needed by someone. By “someone,” he meant himself. Master Ungan was unable to understand Master Hyakujo’s meaning. So he asked why that someone couldn’t do his own work.

Master Hyakujo replied that if that were the case, he himself would have nothing to do every day. In short, working in day-to-day life is Buddhism itself. If we do not do some sort of daily work, we will lose Buddhism itself.

SIXTY-NINE

Master Hyakujo Nehan spoke one day before many monks: *You many monks! When you finish clearing the land for me, I would like to preach the great teachings for you.*

A monk said: *I have cleared all the fields. Master! Please preach the great teachings.*

The Master spread his two arms.

Commentary

Master Hyakujo Nehan said to his assembly of monks (i.e. his students) that when they had finished clearing all the fields, he wanted to preach the great teachings for them. By this, he meant that when they had at last attained and experienced the truth, then he would be able to teach them about that truth.

Without experiencing the truth for themselves, they would never be able to understand his preaching of the truth. Then a monk said that he had already arrived there, and so would the Master please preach for him.

The Master held out both his arms as an expression of the ineffability of reality. He wanted to express that the truth exists everywhere here and now. A person who had experienced reality would be able to understand the Master's action.

SEVENTY

Master Shuzan Shonen preached to an assembly while toying with a bamboo cane in his hands: *If you call this bamboo cane a "bamboo cane," the words do not do the real cane justice. If you do not call it a "bamboo cane," your words are different from the fact. You, many monks! What do you call this?*

At that time, Master Shoken Kisho was in Master Shuzan's order. Hearing these words, he attained the truth. Then, coming up to the Master, he took the bamboo cane and broke it into two pieces, throwing them under the stairs. Then he said: *What is this!*

The Master said: *You! Blind man!*

Master Shoken prostrated himself at once.

Commentary

This story is also connected with the difference between the name of a thing, and the thing itself. To explain the difference, Master Shuzan told his assembly that to use the name does not describe the real thing itself, and yet not to use the name, describes nothing. He asked them to solve the problem.

Master Shoken, who was in Master Shuzan's order at that time, arrived at the truth when he heard the words. So coming up to Master Shuzan he broke the stick in two and threw away the pieces, saying: *"What is this!"*

In Chinese, the word for *what* and the word for *ineffable* are the same. Hence his words have two meanings. Master Shoken wanted to express the fact that all things and matter are ineffable: *"This is what!"*

Master Shuzan affirmed his words using an ironic expression: *"You! Blind man!"* These words seem to contain some criticism of Master Shoken's action, but in fact they are an affirmation of the action in the sense that, like a blind man, Master Shoken does not perceive things with his eyes alone. So Master Shoken prostrated himself in front of the Master at once.

SEVENTY-ONE

Quoting:

One day a monk asked Master Chosa Keishin: *What is the meaning of dharani?*

Master Chosa, pointing to the monk on the left of his Zazen chair, said: *This reverend monk can recite one.*

The monk said: *Is there anyone else who can recite it, or not?*

The Master, pointing to the monk on the right side of his Zazen chair, said: *This reverend monk can recite dharani, too.*

The monk said: *Why don't I hear it?*

The Master said: *Oh, Reverend Monk! Haven't you heard the saying that true recitation has no sound, and true listening has no hearing?*

The monk said: *If that is true, it is impossible for sounds and voices to be part of the nature of the Universe.*

The Master said: *To look for intuitive perception, disregarding matter, is not a true view. And to pursue listening, disregarding voices, is just mistaken hearing.*

Commentary

A monk asked the meaning of *dharani*, a Sanskrit word referring to a short powerful word or phrase. When the monk asked the meaning of *dharani*, the Master pointed to the monk on his left and said that he could recite *dharani*. When the monk asked if there was anyone else who could do the same, the Master said that the monk on his right could, too.

The Master wanted to explain that *dharani* does not refer to an abstract concept, but to the nature of real words that are recited by a concrete person. Then the monk thought that if both these monks could recite *dharani*, he should be able to hear it. However, he could hear nothing.

Then the Master quoted an old saying that true recitation is silent, and true listening has no ears. He meant to tell the monk that a true *dharani* is not something recited or a special sound that is uttered. It is something ineffable in words that are spoken. It is reality itself and is understood by the whole body – not just the ears.

The monk insisted that if true recitation has no sound, then sound cannot be part of the Universe. The Master wanted to correct the monk's words, so he said that we cannot pursue intuitive perception without including the material part of existence.

If we think that some kind of intuitive perception of something called *dharani* exists separate from physical reality, then our idea is different from the Buddhist view. He continued that to believe that there is some way to listen that does not include the physical reality of sounds is also wrong belief. If we want to listen to *dharani*, we have nothing to rely upon but the sounds and voices in our everyday life.

In short, *dharani* is the sound of reality; the voice of reality. Sometimes it is a physical sound, sometimes it has no sound. Sometimes we hear something; sometimes we do not. This is the nature of reality.

SEVENTY-TWO

When Master Obaku Ki-un was staying on Mount Hyakujo, Master Hyakujo Ekai said: *Acarya Ki-un – it can't be easy digging new fields!*

Master Obaku said: *I just do what the other monks do.*

Master Hyakujo said: *I thought that sometimes you may need to use up your energy for the truth.*

Master Obaku said: *How can I dare hesitate to use up my energy!*

Master Hyakujo said: *How many fields have you dug over?*

Master Obaku struck the ground three times with his mattock.

Master Hyakujo immediately cried: *Katsu!*

Master Obaku ran off covering his ears.

Commentary

Master Hyakujo first said some words to praise Master Obaku as he was working so diligently in digging up the ground to make new fields. Master Obaku replied that he didn't care about exhausting his energy in digging. He was only doing the same as everyone else.

Then Master Hyakujo asked how many fields he had dug. Master Obaku felt that to work was the important thing, not what he had achieved. So he struck the ground with his mattock to convey that point.

Master Hyakujo shouted *Katsu!* immediately, but Master Obaku was not interested in hearing theoretical explanations: he was just working in reality. So he ran off covering his ears. Master Obaku's behavior always suggests reality itself.

SEVENTY-THREE

One day, when a monk was standing beside Master Kimpo Jushi, the Master said: *I would like to tell you a story that can serve as a standard. It is most important for you not to have a careless understanding.*

The monk said: *Please tell me Master.*

The Master held up his *hossu*.

The monk waited in silence.

The Master said: *Now I truly know that you possess careless understanding.*

The monk looked to the east and then to the west.

The Master said: *A frost has formed on the snow!*

Commentary

Master Kimpo suggested to a monk who was standing beside him that he would tell him a story to guide him but cautioned the monk against careless understanding. When the monk requested the Master to give him the teachings, the Master held up his *hossu* – the Master's way of indicating that the most important thing in Buddhism is to recognize that reality is concrete action.

The monk was silent for a while, because he did not understand this fundamental point, after which the Master said he was sure that the monk had a careless way of understanding things.

The monk wanted to deny this, so he peered east and west as if to look for this haphazard understanding he was supposed to possess. However, the Master only criticized him further by saying that he was making the situation worse.

SEVENTY-FOUR

When Master Razan Dokan was wandering in the mountains following Master Ganto Zenkatsu, he called out: *Master!*

Master Ganto said: *What?*

Master Razan approached the Master, prostrated himself and said: *Master. Isn't it true that, thirty years ago, when you were at Mount Tozan, you did not affirm Master Tozan?*

Master Ganto said: *It is true.*

Master Razan said: *Master. Isn't it a fact that, even though you succeeded Master Tokuzan Senkan, you did not affirm Master Tokuzan either?*

Master Ganto said: *It is true.*

Master Razan said: *I am not discussing the fact that you did not affirm Master Tokuzan, but in Master Tozan's case, what was it that he lacked?*

Master Ganto was silent for a while, then said: *Master Tozan was a very nice buddha, but he did not have something bright.*

Master Razan immediately prostrated himself.

Commentary

Master Razan asked Master Ganto whether it was true that he did not affirm Master Tokuzan and Master Tozan. When Master Ganto replied in the affirmative, Master Razan said that he didn't have any problem with him not affirming Master Tokuzan, but he couldn't understand what was wrong with Master Tozan. He asked the reason why Master Ganto didn't affirm him.

Master Ganto replied that, although Master Tozan was a nice buddha, he lacked a certain brilliance. He meant that although Master Tozan was quiet and peaceful in his behavior, he lacked the power to radically influence others. On hearing this explanation, Master Razan prostrated himself in front of the Master.

SEVENTY-FIVE

One day, Master Kimpo Jushi picked up a pillow and said: *Everyone calls this a pillow. But Master Kimpo has a different expression.*

A monk asked: *Master! What do you call it?*

The Master picked up the pillow.

The monk said: *If it is true, I would like to follow your action.*

The Master said: *What do you call this?*

The monk said: *A pillow.*

The Master said: *You have fallen into Kimpo's nest!*

Commentary

Master Kimpo explained that although everyone calls a pillow by the name *pillow*, he did something different. When the monk asked what he called it, the Master picked up the pillow, as if to show its real existence, separate from its name. He wanted to explain that he did not like to refer to the concept of the pillow as separate from the real pillow.

The monk replied that he wanted to follow the Master's teachings in this matter. So the Master asked the monk what it was that he had. The monk said a pillow.

With this answer, the Master realized the monk was living in reality, not trapped by some intellectual idea of not using the names of objects. So the Master said that the monk had become like him – he had “*fallen into Kimpo's nest.*”

SEVENTY-SIX

One day, Officer Riku, entering the Zazen Hall, asked Master Isan Reiyu: *Are the many monks here called simply "eating-breakfast-and-lunch monks," or are they called "practicing-Zazen monks"?*

The Master said: *They are neither called monks who eat meals nor monks who practice Zazen.*

The officer said: *What are they doing living here?*

The Master said: *You, officer! Please ask them yourself!*

Commentary

Master Isan Reiyu was asked by an officer whether the monks in the Zazen Hall could be called "*eating monks*" or "*practicing monks*." At that time, monks both ate meals and slept in the Zendo. Master Isan wanted to indicate that monks were real persons who were neither only eating monks nor only practicing monks. He thought that abstract descriptions like eating monks or practicing monks were insufficient to express the real situation in which the monks existed. The officer wanted to know what it was, then, that the monks were doing in the temple.

The Master told him to ask for himself. His intention was to show that the real situation in which those monks were living could not be adequately put into words. Were the officer to ask the monks for himself, some would say that they were eating monks, others would say that they were practicing monks, others that they were neither of those, and still others that they were both of those.

There would be many different answers, and those different answers themselves would suggest something of the real situation. So the Master told the officer to ask for himself.

SEVENTY-SEVEN

Master Tozan Ryokai was crossing a river with Master Ungo Doyo.

Master Tozan asked: *Is the water deep or shallow?*

Master Ungo said: *Not wet!*

Master Tozan said: *What a rough man!*

Master Ungo said: *Please, Master, give me your opinion.*

Master Tozan said: *Not dry!*

Commentary

When the two Masters, Tozan Ryokai and Ungo Doyo, were crossing a river, Master Tozan asked if the water was deep or shallow, to which Master Ungo replied that the water didn't feel wet to him. He meant to convey that whether the water is deep or shallow is of no consequence to a Buddhist practitioner. Although he was wet, he denied the physical fact.

Master Tozan criticized this reply. He thought that Master Ungo's expression was rather rough. He thought that Master Ungo was intentionally denying common sense. So Master Ungo asked Master Tozan for his opinion, to which Master Tozan replied that the water wasn't dry. The phrase "*not dry*" was better than "*not wet*," because "*not dry*" doesn't disagree with the facts.

SEVENTY-EIGHT

Acarya Gen-yo asked Master Joshu Jushin: *What should we do when we do not have anything at all?*

Master Joshu said: *Throw everything away!*

Acarya Gen-yo said: *I don't have anything! What can I throw away?*

Master Joshu said: *In that case, please take it all.*

Commentary

Master Gen-yo Zenshin asked Master Joshu how a man in the state where he feels he doesn't have anything should behave. Master Joshu told Master Gen-yo that he should throw away even such worrying. Master Gen-yo's understanding of this was somewhat intellectual. He asked how he could throw away everything if he didn't have anything to start with.

Master Joshu replied that, in that case he should take everything. Master Joshu meant that thinking that we have something or do not have anything are both just ideas. By acting, we can transcend our ideas.

SEVENTY-NINE

Master Daibai Hojo in the Min district asked Master Baso Do-itsu: *What exactly is buddha?*

Master Baso said: *Mind here and now is just buddha.*

Commentary

Master Daibai Hojo asked Master Baso what was the real meaning of buddha. Master Baso answered that mind here and now is buddha. He meant that, although people think that buddha is a state that we arrive at after long years of practice, Buddhists have a different idea. To be fully present here and now is to be awake, is to be buddha.

When we practice Zazen, we can be buddha at once. It is true that mind here and now without the practice of Zazen is not always buddha, but at the same time, we should not believe that buddha is a state arrived at only after many years of practice.

EIGHTY

Master Isan Reiyu preached to an assembly: *People today can only get Great Nature; they cannot get Great Function.*

Master Kyozan repeated these words to the tender of a small cottage in the temple. The man trod on an orange and crushed it.

On hearing of this, Master Isan laughed loudly.

Commentary

Master Isan preached that although people of that time were able to get Great Nature, they could not get Great Function. He meant that although people had excellent abilities, they did not show this fact in their behavior. When the resident of the temple cottage heard this, he trod on an orange to show that he had Great Function.

The man thought that monks in the temple also had Great Function and that the Master might be wrong in his insistence. He trod on an orange to criticize the Master's opinion, as if to say "*Do your words 'Great Function' mean stupid actions like this?*" Master Isan thought that this was highly comical when he heard it, and laughed loudly.

EIGHTY-ONE

Master Tozan Shusho arrived at Master Unmon Bun-en's temple. Master Unmon asked: *Where have you just come from?*

Master Shusho said: *I have traveled across the lake on a raft.*

Master Unmon said: *Where were you in the summer?*

Master Shusho said: *Ho Temple, at the south end of the lake (i.e. south of Lake Dotei – the Konan District).*

Master Unmon asked: *When did you leave that order?*

Master Shusho said: *On the 25th of August.*

Master Unmon said: *I will consent to your not being immediately struck three times with a stick.*

The next day, Master Shusho went to Master Unmon's private room and asked: *You consented yesterday to my not being immediately struck three times with a stick. I am puzzled why? What did I do wrong?*

Master Unmon said: *You bag of boiled rice! Why did you leave Kozei and Konan so suddenly?*

Master Shusho attained the great truth there and then.

Commentary

Master Shusho arrived at Master Unmon's temple, so quite naturally, Master Unmon asked where he had just come from. When Master Shusho said that he had just left Ho Temple, Master Unmon criticized his leaving, because he knew that the master there was excellent. Master Shusho did not know why he had been criticized.

When he at last realized that his master's words were criticizing him for leaving Ho temple – that he had missed the rare opportunity to study under an excellent master through his impulsive behavior – he realized the truth.

EIGHTY-TWO

Master Joshu Jushin visited the master of a Buddhist hermitage and said:
Have you got anything? Have you got anything?

The Master of the hut held up his hand in a fist.

Master Jushin said: *The water is shallow. This is not the place for a ship to berth.*

Then he left.

Later, he visited another master in his hut and said: *Have you got anything? Have you got anything?*

The Master of the hut held up his hand in a fist.

Master Jushin said: *You can free all things and you can grasp all things. You can kill things, and you can give things life.*

After prostrating himself, he left.

Commentary

Master Jushin asked exactly the same question of both masters. And the response he got from both masters was the same. To one master he said that there was no place for him there, while he praised the other. Although the questions were identical and the answers identical, Master Jushin denied the first and affirmed the second.

If we think about Master Jushin's actions, from a logical point of view they don't seem to make sense. In reality, these two masters in their huts both had their own unique states of existence. And it was because Master Jushin could see the real state of each master that he denied one and affirmed the other.

When we read this story, we can remember that things in reality are sometimes different from what they seem to be from stories.

EIGHTY-THREE

Master Gensa Shibi watched Master Kozan Shin-an arriving and traced a round circle in the air with his finger.

Master Kozan said: *It is impossible for anyone to get out of that!*

Master Gensa said: *I realize completely. The vigorous efforts you are making are directed to the insides of a donkey; to a horse's belly!*

Master Kozan said: *What about you yourself, Master? What's the situation with you?*

Master Gensa said: *It is impossible for anyone to get out of that!*

Master Kozan said: *That's what Master Gensa says, and that's what I said. Then why is it impossible for me to get it?*

Master Gensa said: *I can get it – you cannot get it.*

Commentary

Master Gensa drew a circle in the air when he saw Master Kozan coming towards him. Master Kozan responded by saying that no-one could get out of that. Master Gensa thought that Master Kozan had understood his action intellectually, so he was critical of Master Kozan's reply.

Master Kozan couldn't understand why, so he asked Master Gensa for his opinion. Master Gensa replied with the same words that Master Kozan had used. To this, Master Kozan said that if his words and Master Gensa's words were the same, why was it that Master Gensa had criticized his state?

Master Gensa replied simply that he could get it but Master Kozan could not. He meant that he had realized reality but Master Kozan had not. This sounds rather blunt and not such a kind reply, but in fact, one person can realize reality and another cannot. In the area of reality, Master Gensa's words were true.

EIGHTY-FOUR

One day Master Seppo Gison was asked by a monk: *What is it like when we are in an eternal valley or a cold spring?*

Master Seppo said: *Even though we open our eyes widely, we cannot see the bottom.*

The monk said: *What is it like when we drink it?*

Master Seppo said: *Water will not enter the mouth.*

On hearing this story, Master Joshu Jushin said: *Of course! Water will not enter the nostrils either!*

Then a monk asked Master Joshu: *What is it like when we are in an eternal valley or a cold spring?*

Master Joshu said: *It is painful!*

The monk said: *What's it like when we drink it?*

Master Joshu said: *We will die.*

When Master Seppo heard these words, he said: *Master Joshu is an eternal Buddha.*

After that time, Master Seppo didn't engage in any discussions.

Commentary

The words “*eternal valley*” and “*cold spring*” symbolize the ultimate state in Buddhist life. Such a state is not visible to the eyes, so Master Seppo said to the monk's question that we cannot see through to the bottom, even if we try. The monk tried a different tack: he asked what happens when we drink the water from the spring.

Master Seppo replied that we cannot drink it because the ultimate state in Buddhism is not something that can be detected with the senses. When Master Joshu heard this reply, he was a little critical of Master Seppo's rather abstract reply to the monk's question – he said that of course water couldn't enter the nostrils either. Nostrils are symbolic here of life itself.

Of course, Master Seppo's reply was not all that abstract, but Master Joshu wanted to be even more realistic. When the monk continued with the same line

of questioning, Master Joshu replied that it was painful to be in the ultimate Buddhist state.

People usually think that the ultimate state must be pleasant and happy. However, Master Joshu's reply was that because the ultimate Buddhist state is reality itself, it is sometimes painful and miserable.

Master Joshu described the other face of reality to the one normally expressed. When the monk asked what happens if we drink the water, Master Joshu said that we die. He meant that in the ultimate Buddhist state, in reality itself, we transcend both thinking and sense perception. He used the word *die* to describe that state.

On hearing Master Joshu's reply, Master Seppo called him an eternal Buddha – he was very struck by Master Joshu's answer. He recognized the futility of discussion in Buddhism, and from that time, refrained from abstract discussions.

EIGHTY-FIVE

During his travels, Master Tempyo Jui arrived at Sai-in Temple. It was his habit to say: *Nowadays, we should not say that we can understand Buddhism. If I search for someone with whom I can have a concrete discussion, it is impossible to find anyone.*

One day, as he was coming out of the Lecture Hall and passing by, Master Sai-in called to him loudly: *Jui!*

Master Tempyo cocked his head.

Master Sai-in said: *A mistake. Just a mistake.*

Master Tempyo continued on two or three steps.

Master Sai-in said again: *Just a mistake.*

Master Tempyo came up to him.

Master Sai-in said: *These two mistakes I mentioned – are they my mistakes or your mistakes?*

Master Tempyo said: *They are Jui's mistakes.*

Master Sai-in said: *Just mistakes.*

Master Tempyo stopped talking and started to leave.

Master Sai-in said: *Veteran monk! How about staying here through the summer for a while? We could discuss those two mistakes.*

At this, Master Tempyo left immediately.

After this time, when Master Tempyo was master of his own temple, he said to an assembly: *When I was on my travels in the past, I was blown by the wind of my past conduct and arrived at Master Sai-in Shimei. He often tested me and told me about my two mistakes. Then he suggested that I stay in his temple during the summer and he would have discussions for my benefit. Although I did not admit to my mistakes at that time, when I was on my way to the south after I had left, I soon saw clearly what my mistakes were.*

Commentary

This story is about Master Tempyo who traveled to many places pursuing Buddhism. He liked to say that nowadays there was no-one who could understand Buddhism, and that he could find no-one with whom to have a discussion. These were rather proud words. When he arrived at Master Sai-in Shimei's temple, Master Sai-in wanted to teach him. He could see how proud Master Tempyo was, and so he called out to him one day by name – Jui.

Then something about Master Tempyo's attitude stopped him. So he said that it was just a mistake. In saying these words, Master Sai-in wanted to convey to Master Tempyo that he wanted to teach him about Buddhism, and also to make Master Tempyo aware of his haughtiness. So he said the words again. Master Tempyo felt this was rather strange, so he came up to the Master.

Then Master Sai-in asked whether the mistakes were his or Master Tempyo's in order to make Master Tempyo see his point. Master Tempyo replied that they were his mistakes; but this was out of politeness. Master Sai-in intentionally did not say whether the mistakes were his or Master Tempyo's – he hoped that Master Tempyo would be able to catch a glimpse of his own attitude.

Master Tempyo did not understand. He said nothing. So Master Sai-in offered Master Tempyo a place at the temple through the summer retreat and offered to discuss the mistakes with Master Tempyo. He wanted to explain to Master Tempyo why he had talked about mistakes. He was hopeful that Master Tempyo would be able to recognize his childish pride. At that time, Master Tempyo was unable to understand, and left the temple.

Later, when Master Tempyo was the master of his own temple, he was candid enough to admit to his monks that he had recognized that the mistakes had indeed been his own.

EIGHTY-SIX

Master Sozan Konin preached to an assembly: *Before the Kantsu Era, I, an old Master, came to understand things close to the body of the Universe. After the Kantsu Era, I came to understand that which transcends the body of the Universe.*

Master Unmon stepped out from the assembly and asked: *What are "things close to the body of the Universe"?*

Master Sozan said: *A dry wooden stake.*

Master Unmon said: *What is "that which transcends the body of the Universe"?*

Master Sozan said: *It is not a dry wooden stake.*

Master Unmon said: *Will you or will you not permit me, a student, to discuss the theory?*

Master Sozan said: *I permit you.*

Master Unmon said: *Is it not so that simply a dry wooden stake explains "things close to the body of the Universe"?*

Master Sozan said: *It is so.*

Master Unmon said: *Is it not so that simply a dry wooden stake explains "that which transcends the body of the Universe"?*

Master Sozan said: *It is so.*

Master Unmon said: *Then I cannot understand. Does the body of the Universe include all things or not?*

Master Sozan said: *The body of the Universe is wholly inclusive. How can it not include all things?*

Master Unmon said, pointing to an urn of pure water: *Does this have the body of the Universe or not?*

Master Sozan said: *Don't try to recognize the body of the Universe as existing near the urn.*

Master Unmon said: *I understand. I understand.*

Commentary

Master Sozan Konin commented that he understood things close to the body of the Universe before the Kantsu Era, and that after the Kantsu Era he understood that which transcends the body of the Universe. Master Unmon asked him for further explanation. Master Sozan replied "*a dry wooden stake*" when asked to explain things near the body of the Universe, and "*not a dry wooden stake*" when asked to explain that which transcends the body of the Universe. By this he meant, that which transcends the body of the Universe is without name.

Master Unmon was not satisfied. He wanted to confirm whether the Universe contained all things or not, because he did not understand how it was possible for anything that is different from a dry wooden stake (that is, different from the Universe) to exist.

When Master Sozan affirmed that the body of the Universe did indeed include all things, Master Unmon asked how the urn of drinking water near them could include the body of the Universe.

Master Sozan did not answer directly; instead he told him not to seek for something larger than an urn which includes the urn. He wanted to tell Master Unmon not to divide the Universe into what is included and what is not included; not to intellectualize; not to deal in comparative ways of thinking about the problem. He wanted to convey the fact that the body of the Universe *is* the urn, too.

EIGHTY-SEVEN

Master Kyosei Dofu asked a monk: *What is the sound outside the gate?*

The monk said: *The sound of raindrops.*

Master Kyosei said: *Living beings get upset and delude themselves into pursuing material things.*

The monk said: *How about you, Master?*

The Master said: *I hardly delude myself at all.*

The monk said: *What do you mean to say?*

The Master said: *It is easy to do something. Still, to say something about the area in which we are free may be difficult.*

Commentary

Master Kyosei asked what the sound was outside the gate. The monk gave a direct and concrete reply. He said it was the sound of the rain. Master Kyosei affirmed the monk's practical answer and said that in general, human beings are apt to become upset and delude themselves into pursuing things.

The monk asked if the Master himself was like this. The Master said he had almost no delusions. The monk pressed the Master for more explanation, so the Master said that to act is not so difficult, but to express the state of action in which we are free from all hindrance is difficult.

He meant that acting in a real situation is not difficult, but it is almost impossible to explain the nature of reality itself.

EIGHTY-EIGHT

Master Seppo Gison preached to an assembly: *Many buddhas of the past, present, and future are existing in the fire's flames, and they are preaching Great Gautama Buddha's teachings.*

Master Gensa Shibi said: *The fire's flames are preaching for the many buddhas of the past, present, and future, and the many buddhas of the past, present, and future are listening to the preaching standing upright on the ground.*

Commentary

Master Seppo Gison preached that even in the fire's flames, the many buddhas of the past, present, and future are preaching Gautama Buddha's teachings. He meant that everything in this world is just buddha. So that when we look at the fire's flames, we can see the natural, flickering form of the fire, just as it is. And the fire showing its true form, just as it is, is the preaching of Gautama Buddha's teachings.

Master Gensa wanted to express the same thing in a slightly different way – he said that the flames themselves were preaching, and the many buddhas of the past, present, and future were standing upright on the ground listening to the sermon. *“Standing upright on the ground”* suggests listening to the sermon with respect and sincerity, and with a realistic attitude.

This conversation points out that all things and phenomena in the Universe, including the fire's flames, are invaluable, because they are showing us the truth.

EIGHTY-NINE

A monk asked Master Joshu Jushin: *"Before this world existed, the essence of the world existed. And when the world is destroyed, the essence will not be destroyed." What is this essence which is indestructible?*

Master Joshu said: *The four elements and the five aggregates.*

The monk said: *Those are what are destroyed. Just what is the essence that is not destroyed?*

Master Joshu said: *The four elements and the five aggregates.*

Commentary

The monk thought that there exists some essence in this world that has existed from before this world came into existence, and which will continue after this world is destroyed. He asked the Master what this essence is. Master Joshu told him it was the four elements and five aggregates, terms which are commonly used to describe the material world itself.

Master Joshu wanted to say that the essence that exists is not something that is different from the physical world. Buddhist thought says that we can find an *essence* in the objective world, and that essence allows us to give the objective world value. We should not divide the Universe into two parts: eternal essence and physical matter, for in reality, they are inseparable.

The monk did not understand Master Joshu's reply. So he asked again, thinking that the four elements and five aggregates could not be used to represent essence. He thought they only represented things that could be destroyed. But Master Joshu was firm. He gave the same reply again.

NINETY

Master Dogo Enchi visited a bereaved family with Master Zengen Chuko. Striking the coffin, Master Zengen said to Master Dogo: *Living or dead?*

Master Dogo said: *I am not saying living; I am not saying dead.*

Master Zengen said: *Why won't you say?*

Master Dogo said: *I will never say! I will never say!*

Master Zengen could not guess what he meant. After that, in another place, he realized the truth upon hearing a man's voice reciting the Buddhist scriptures.

Commentary

Master Dogo Enchi and Master Zengen Chuko went together to offer condolences to a bereaved family. The reason why Master Dogo wouldn't answer Master Zengen's question was that he knew that our normal distinction between life and death is a distinction that we hold in our minds.

In fact, when we encounter a "dead" person, we find the label "dead" completely inadequate in describing the real situation. So he didn't answer. Master Zengen was unable to understand this, so he insisted strongly that Master Dogo reply. Master Dogo, however, refused.

Then, at another time, Master Zengen was able to realize why it was that Master Dogo did not answer living or dead. When listening to the voice of someone reciting the scriptures, he recognized the existence of reality, something different from the labels we use to describe it.

He recognized that reality is total and is beyond distinctions such as living or dead. What we call "living" and what we call "dead" are labels made by the human mind, but they do not describe our real experience completely.

NINETY-ONE

Master Seppo Gison preached to an assembly: *I have met with you in the house of Bo Shu Tei. I have met with you on the summit of U Seki Rei. I have met with you in front of the Zazen Hall.*

Master Hofuku asked Master Gako: *I would like to put "in front of the Zazen Hall" to one side. But what does he mean by "in the house of Bo Shu Tei" and "on the summit of U Seki Rei?"*

Master Gako walked quickly back to his own room. Master Hofuku bowed and entered the Zazen Hall.

Commentary

The house of Bo Shu Tei and the summit of U Seki Rei peak were famous spots on Seppo Mountain where Master Seppo had his temple. Master Seppo Gison said that Buddhist monks can always meet in that house or on the summit, or in front of the Zazen Hall because they always have the same state.

He meant that Buddhists in the Buddhist state could meet in equal states anywhere. Master Hofuku's question was to test whether or not Master Gako Chifu had understood Master Seppo's words. Master Gako demonstrated the state of the Buddhist monk with his own actions – he went back to his room. Then Master Hofuku bowed and went in to practice Zazen.

This story explains that the state that exists in common for all Buddhist monks is in their conduct – in the actions of their real life.

NINETY-TWO

Quoting:

Master Kassan Zen-e of Reishu preached to an assembly: *What is in front of our eyes is not Dharma; what is in front of our eyes is consciousness. That is not the Dharma in front of our eyes; Dharma is different from the place that our eyes and ears can reach.*

Commentary

Master Kassan explained what Dharma – reality – is. Although we are always existing in Dharma, we cannot perceive it only with the eyes or ears, since “*what is in front of us*” is always being interpreted through our consciousness. Of course, what we see in front of us now is part of reality, but we cannot perceive the total form of the Universe.

The phrase “*the Dharma in front of our eyes*” does not refer only to the world as we perceive and interpret it. Dharma is ineffable; the whole of reality cannot be grasped by our perceptions and mind alone.

NINETY-THREE

Master Nansen Fugan preached to an assembly: *I do not know whether buddhas of the past, present, and future exist or not. But I know that there are cats and white oxen.*

Commentary

Master Nansen described the real situation here and now. Many monks discuss the buddhas of the past, present, and future – but who can see these past, present and future buddhas? Buddhist theory should not be abstract or vague.

This is why Master Nansen denied that kind of abstract discussion and insisted that he knew only of the existence of cats and white oxen in this real world. His words indicate the realistic attitude of Buddhists.

These words of Master Nansen's were quoted by Master Eisai and recorded in Master Dogen's biography. When Master Dogen was young and had doubts about Buddhist theory, he visited Master Eisai in Kennin Temple in Kyoto. He asked Master Eisai about the fundamental theory of the Tendai sect which says that human nature follows the rule of the Universe naturally, and our physical bodies are splendid without effort. Master Dogen wanted to know why, if those theories are true, it is necessary for us to train ourselves in Buddhism.

On hearing this question, Master Esai replied with the words of Master Nansen: *"I do not know whether buddhas of the past, present, and future exist or not. But I know that there are cats and white oxen."*

NINETY-FOUR

Master Joshu Jushin said: *The Eye that grasps the whole Universe has continued to exist for many ages; it leaks away nothing – not even a thousandth or a ten-thousandth part. I ask you to try to understand this. What is your understanding?*

Commentary

Master Joshu described the Buddhist “Eye” that can see the whole Universe in its entirety. He said that this viewpoint has continued without ceasing for many ages.

He was not denying the existence of “*the Eye that grasps the whole Universe.*” At the same time, he knew well that the situation was not something that could be made the object of understanding. However, he asked his students to try to understand. His request was a kind of test. So he said “*What is your understanding?*” What he was actually saying to them was, “*Do you think that the situation is understandable?*”

NINETY-FIVE

When Master Seppo Gison was taking a walk with Master Sansho Enen, they saw a group of monkeys. Master Seppo said: *Each of those monkeys is carrying an eternal mirror on its back.*

Master Sansho said: *The situation has remained unnamed for many eons. Why do you describe it with the words "eternal mirror"?*

Master Seppo said: *A crack has appeared!*

Master Sansho said: *You, reverend monk, with fifteen hundred students, cannot even recognize the meaning of the words!*

Master Seppo said: *I am too busy in my job as Temple Master.*

Commentary

Master Seppo and Master Sansho were walking together when they saw a group of monkeys passing by them. Master Seppo said that each monkey carried an "*eternal mirror*," the Buddhist symbol for Buddhist intuition, on their backs. Buddhist theory says that all living beings possess an intuitive ability, and Master Seppo wanted to point out that monkeys did, too.

Master Sansho did not like the way that Master Seppo expressed the ineffable – that which cannot be put into words. He was critical of Master Seppo's attitude. Master Seppo's "*A crack has appeared*," was a frank affirmation of Master Sansho's opinion, but Master Sansho criticized him still further, by saying that in spite of having so many students, Master Seppo still could not recognize what the words meant – that is, he couldn't recognize the meaning of Buddhist theory.

Master Seppo simply continued to be polite to his student, accepting his criticism gracefully and easily. He said he was just too busy as a Temple Master. This story illustrates very clearly Master Seppo's excellent Buddhist attitude. Even though his student's criticism was quite aggressive, he didn't lose his temper; he accepted the criticism calmly. Such an attitude is very difficult to maintain, but Master Seppo was usually like this. Although it sometimes seems that he was too polite, his attitude conceals the fact that he was a true Buddhist Master.

Master Dogen revered Master Seppo highly, and he discusses this story, and others concerning the eternal mirror, in *Shobogenzo Kokyo* (*The Eternal Mirror*).

NINETY-SIX

Master Unmon Bun-en preached to an assembly: *In all directions, and inside the whole Universe there is one treasure, which is concealed in the human body. This treasure is in entering the Buddha Hall carrying a lantern, and in the temple gate brought into the lantern's light.*

Commentary

Master Unmon wanted to describe something that exists in the human body and is expressed in the whole Universe. That is the value of action.

Here he uses the simple examples of a person entering the Buddha Hall carrying a lantern, and illuminating the temple gate with the light of the lamp. The first example is an active description (taking the lantern to the Buddha Hall), and the second is a passive description (the gate is brought into the lantern's light). Viewing the situation from these two sides works to capture the dual nature of real action.

This treasure within us is realized as we carry out our day-to-day activities. It is our real world, which can be called Dharma.

NINETY-SEVEN

One day a monk asked Master Hogen Bun-eki: *How can we pass through the two qualities, voice and color?*

The Master said: *If the assembly can understand what this monk has asked, it will not be difficult for them to pass through voice and color!*

Commentary

Voice means something that is heard (sound) and *color* means something that is seen (form). So “*to pass through voice and color*” means to transcend objective things that are perceived through the sense organs.

Master Hogen’s answer explains that if someone is able to formulate the question, “*How can we pass through voice and color?*” he has already transcended objective things; his wish to transcend objective things shows that he must be sincerely pursuing the ineffable something that is the essence of Buddhism.

NINETY-EIGHT

One day, a monk asked Master Ryuge Koton: *What was Master Bodhidharma's intention in coming from the west?*

Master Ryuge said: *After the black stone turtle has learned to understand my words, then I will tell you.*

Commentary

A monk asked Master Ryuge why Master Bodhidharma, the first Patriarch in China, came from India in the west, to China. Master Ryuge's reply showed that he thought that it was not possible to put the reason into words; a stone turtle can never understand human speech.

We should not aim to understand Master Bodhidharma's intention. His action is a historical fact: it was just Master Bodhidharma's action in his life. It is beyond a solely intellectual understanding.

NINETY-NINE

One day, Master Chokei Eryo said: *Even if we teach that the Arhat proclaims the theory of the three poisons, we should never teach that the Tathagata speaks words that are separated into two extremes. I am not saying that the Tathagata does not speak words, but he does not speak words that are separated into two extremes.*

Master Hofuku Juten said: *What are the Tathagata's words?*

Master Chokei said: *How can a deaf man hear them?*

Master Hofuku said: *I know truly that you are talking to the second head.*

Master Chokei said: *Then what are the Tathagata's words?*

Master Hofuku said: *Please have some tea.*

Commentary

Master Chokei insisted strongly that we should not say that the Tathagata's words can be separated into two extremes: that is, two opposite viewpoints. He said that to malign the teachings of Arhats is not good, but the words of the Tathagata must never be maligned. So Master Hofuku asked him what these words might be.

Master Chokei refused to explain, saying that a deaf person couldn't hear them – a criticism of Master Hofuku's question. Master Hofuku criticized this reply because he thought that Master Chokei's reply itself was divided. To talk to the second head means to divide intellectually.

At this, Master Chokei asked for Master Hofuku's opinion. Master Hofuku replied, *"Please have some tea,"* suggesting that the Tathagata's teaching was included in the simple actions of our daily life.

Although Buddhist theory is necessary for explanations, it cannot help us to get the Buddhist state; to practice Zazen and conduct ourselves with sincerity in our daily life is just Buddhism itself.

ONE HUNDRED

When visiting Master Sekito Kisen, Master Go-ei Reimoku asked: *If even a single word of yours is agreeable to me, I will stay here. If it is not agreeable, I will leave.*

Master Sekito did not respond at all.

Master Reimoku left swinging his long sleeves. After going out, he arrived at the temple gate. The Master called out to him, saying: *Acarya!*

Master Reimoku turned his head.

Master Sekito said: *From birth to death it is just this! Will you accomplish something by turning your head or by churning your brain?*

There and then, Master Reimoku experienced the truth.

Commentary

Master Reimoku visited Master Sekito and said he would stay in Master Sekito's temple only if he found Master Sekito's teachings agreeable to him. This was rather an arrogant attitude, so Master Sekito did not pay any attention to him.

Master Reimoku thought that Master Sekito could not answer him, and started to leave, swinging his sleeves arrogantly. When he got to the gate, Master Sekito called him and Master Reimoku naturally turned his head.

Master Sekito told him that reality is not concerned with intellectual jousting; it is far more simple and direct. He wanted Master Reimoku to notice that a simple action like turning the head is natural and real, but thoughts in our brain are just that – intellectual images.

At these words, Master Reimoku recognized the real situation.

ONE HUNDRED AND ONE

Master Rinzai Gigen was entering an army encampment to have dinner. In front of the encampment gate he saw a government official. Pointing at the wooden post standing there, the Master asked: *Is this ordinary or sacred?*

The government official had no words.

Slapping the post, the Master said: *Even if you could say what this is, it is still a real wooden pole!*

Then he went inside.

Commentary

Most religions separate the sacred from the ordinary, but in Buddhism the ordinary and the sacred are one and the same. Ordinary everyday actions and ordinary everyday things are sacred.

Master Rinzai was invited to dine in an army encampment. On his way towards the gate to the encampment, he met a government official who we can guess was a student of his.

Pointing at a wooden post nearby, he asked his student whether it was ordinary or sacred. As the official did not reply, we cannot know whether he understood Buddhism and that was why he was silent, or whether he could not reply.

Master Rinzai slapped the post and said that to think about whether it was ordinary or sacred was a waste of time – it was just a real wooden pole. With that he continued on to eat his meal.

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* *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo*, Nishijima & Cross, Windbell Publications 1994-99 (4 volumes)

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One day Master Reiun Shigon from the Fuku district
arrived at the truth while looking at peach
blossoms. He wrote a poem:

*For thirty years I have been a traveler looking
for something sharp like a sword.
Many times have the leaves of autumn fallen,
and the twigs of spring sprouted.
But seeing these peach blossoms, I have entered
this moment of the present directly.
Now I have no more doubts.*

He showed the poem to Master Isan Reiyu.
Master Isan said: A man who enters the truth through
objective circumstances will not regress or lose the truth.
You should guard and maintain it well.

The Shinji Shobogenzo is a collection of three hundred and one Chinese *koans*, stories describing the teachings, conversations, and actions of ancient Buddhist masters. It was compiled in the 13th century by Master Dogen, the founder of the Soto Sect of Buddhism and one of the most brilliant philosophers in Japanese history. This essential collection encompasses many of the well-known *koan* stories and other interesting and less familiar ones, and is presented here together with a commentary by Gudo Nishijima Roshi, a contemporary Buddhist master renowned for his clear and no-nonsense approach.