

THE
GATELESS
GATE

Joshu's "mu"

A monk once asked Master Joshu, "Has a dog the Buddha Nature or not?" Joshu said, "Mu!"

Mumon's commentary

In studying Zen, one must pass the barriers set up by ancient Zen Masters. For the attainment of incomparable *satori*, one has to cast away his discriminating mind. Those who have not passed the barrier and have not cast away the discriminating mind are all phantoms haunting trees and plants.

Now, tell me, what is the barrier of the Zen Masters? Just this "Mu"—it is the barrier of Zen. It is thus called "the gateless barrier of Zen." Those who have passed the barrier will not only see Joshu clearly, but will go hand in hand with all the Masters of the past, see them face to face. You will see with the same eye that they see with and hear with the same ear. Wouldn't it be wonderful? Don't you want to pass the barrier? Then concentrate yourself into this "Mu," with your 360 bones and 84,000 pores, making your whole body one great inquiry. Day and night, work intently at it. Do not attempt nihilistic or dualistic interpretations. It is like having bolted a red hot iron ball. You try to vomit it but cannot.

Cast away your illusory discriminating knowledge and consciousness accumulated up to now, and keep on working harder. After a while, when your efforts come to fruition, all the oppositions (such as in and out) will naturally be identified. You will then be like a dumb person who has had a wonderful dream: he only knows it personally, within himself. Suddenly you break through the barrier; you will astonish heaven and shake the earth.

It is as if you have snatched the great sword of General Kan. You kill the Buddha if you meet him; you kill the ancient Masters if you meet them. On the brink of life and death you are utterly free, and in the six realms and the four modes of life you live, with great joy, a genuine life in complete freedom.

Now, how should one strive?
With might and main work at this
"Mu," and be "Mu." If you do not
waver in your striving, then behold,
when the Dharma candle is lighted,
darkness is at once enlightened.

Mumon's poem

*The dog! The Buddha Nature!
The Truth is manifested in full.
A moment of yes-and-no:
lost are your body and soul.*

Hyakujo and a fox

Whenever Master Hyakujo gave *teisho* on Zen, an old man sat with the monks to listen and always withdrew when they did. One day, however, he remained behind, and the Master asked, "Who are you standing here before me?" The old man replied, "I am not a human being. In the past, in the time of the Kasho Buddha, I was the head of this monastery. Once a monk asked me, 'Does an enlightened man also fall into causation or not?' I replied, 'He does not.' Because of this answer, I was made to live as a fox for five hundred lives. Now I beg you, please say the turning words on my behalf and release me from the fox body." The old man then asked Hyakujo, "Does an enlightened man also fall into causation or not?" The Master said, "He does not ignore causation." Hearing this the old man was at once enlightened. Making a bow to Hyakujo he said, "I have now been released from the fox body, which will be found behind the mountain. I dare to make a request of the Master. Please bury it as you would a deceased monk."

The Master had the Ino strike the gavel and announce to the monks that there would be a funeral for a deceased monk after the midday meal. The monks wondered, saying, "We are all in good health. There is no sick monk in the Nirvana Hall. What is it all about?"

After the meal the Master led the monks to a rock behind the mountain, poked out a dead fox with his staff, and cremated it.

In the evening the Master ascended the rostrum in the hall and told the monks the whole story. Obaku thereupon asked, "The old man failed to give the correct turning words and was made to live as a fox for five hundred lives, you say; if, however, his answer had not been incorrect each time, what would he have become?" The Master said, "Come closer to me, I'll tell you." Obaku then stepped forward to Hyakujo and slapped him. The Master laughed aloud, clapping his hands, and said, "I thought a foreigner's beard is red, but I see that it is a foreigner with a red beard."

Mumon's commentary

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

Mumon's poem

*Not falling, not ignoring:
odd and even are on one die.
Not ignoring, not falling:
hundreds and thousands of regrets!*

Gutei raises a finger

Master Gutei, whenever he was questioned, just stuck up one finger.

At one time he had a young attendant, whom a visitor asked, "What is the Zen your Master is teaching?" The boy also stuck up one finger. Hearing of this, Gutei cut off the boy's finger with a knife. As the boy ran out screaming with pain, Gutei called to him. When the boy turned his head, Gutei stuck up his finger. The boy was suddenly enlightened.

When Gutei was about to die, he said to the assembled monks, "I attained Tenryu's Zen of One Finger. I used it all through my life, but could not exhaust it." When he had finished saying this, he died.

Mumon's commentary

The *satori* of Gutei and of the boy attendant are not in the finger. If you really see through this, Tenryu, Gutei, the boy, and you yourself are all run through with one skewer.

Mumon's poem

*Gutei made a fool of old Tenryu,
with a sharp knife he chastised the boy.
Korei raised his hand with no effort,
and lo! The great ridge of Mount Ka was split in two!*

The foreigner has no beard

Wakuan said, "Why has the foreigner from the West no beard?"

Mumon's commentary

Training in Zen has to be real training. *Satori* has to be real *satori*. You have to see this foreigner here clearly yourself; then you actually know him. If, however, you talk about "clearly seeing," you have already fallen into dichotomy.

Mumon's poem

*In front of a fool
talk of no dream.*

*The foreigner has no beard:
it is adding stupidity to clarity.*

Kyogen's man up a tree

Master Kyogen said, "It is like a man up a tree who hangs from a branch by his mouth; his hands cannot grasp a bough, his feet cannot touch the tree. Another man comes under the tree and asks him the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West. If he does not answer, he does not meet the questioner's need. If he answers, he will lose his life. At such a time, how should he answer?"

Mumon's commentary

Even though your eloquence flows like a river, it is all to no avail. Even if you can expound the Great Tripitaka, it is also of no use. If you can really answer it, you will revive the dead and kill the living. If, however, you are unable to answer, wait for Maitreya to come and ask him.

Mumon's poem

*Kyogen is just gibbering;
how vicious his poison is!
Stopping up the monks' mouths,
he makes their devil's eyes glare!*

Sakyamuni holds up a flower

Long ago when the World-Honored One was at Mount Grdhrakuta to give a talk, he held up a flower before the assemblage. At this all remained silent. The Venerable Kasho alone broke into a smile. The World-Honored One said, "I have the all-pervading True Dharma, incomparable Nirvana, exquisite teaching of formless form. It does not rely on letters and is transmitted outside scriptures. I now hand it to Maha Kasho."

Mumon's commentary

Yellow-faced Gotama is certainly outrageous. He turns the noble into the lowly, sells dog-flesh advertised as sheep's head. I thought there was something interesting in it. However at that time if everyone in the assemblage had smiled, to whom would the True Dharma have been handed? Or again, if Kasho had not smiled, would the True Dharma have been transmitted? If you say that the True Dharma can be transmitted, the yellow-faced old man with his loud voice deceived simple villagers. If you say that it cannot be transmitted, then why was Kasho alone approved?

Mumon's poem

*A flower is held up,
and the secret has been revealed.
Kasho breaks into a smile;
the whole assemblage is at a loss.*



Joshu says "Wash your bowls"

Once a monk made a request of Joshu. "I have just entered the monastery," he said. "Please give me instructions, Master." Joshu said, "Have you had your breakfast?" "Yes, I have," replied the monk. "Then," said Joshu, "wash your bowls." The monk had an insight.

Mumon's commentary

Joshu opened his mouth and showed his gallbladder, and revealed his heart and liver. If this monk, hearing it, failed to grasp the Truth, he would mistake a bell for a pot.

Mumon's poem

*Because it is so very clear,
it takes longer to come to the realization.
If you know at once candlelight is fire,
the meal has long been cooked.*



Keichu makes carts

Master Gettan said to a monk: "Keichu made a cart whose wheels had a hundred spokes. Take both front and rear parts away and remove the axle: then what will it be?"

Mumon's commentary

If you can immediately see through this, your eye will be like a shooting star and your spirituality like lightning.

Mumon's poem

*When the vividly working wheel turns
even an expert is lost.*

*Four directions, above and below:
south, north, east, and west.*



Daitsu Chisho

Once a monk said to Master Seijo of Koyo, "Daitsu Chisho Buddha did *zazen* on a *bodhi* seat for ten *kalpas*. Buddha Dharma was not manifested, nor did he attain Buddhahood. Why was it?" Jo said, "Your question is splendid indeed." The monk persisted, "He did practice *zazen* on a *bodhi* seat. Why did he not attain Buddhahood?" Jo replied, "Because he did not attain Buddhahood."

Mumon's commentary

The old foreigner may know it, but he cannot really grasp it. An ordinary man, if he knows it, is a sage. A sage, if he grasps it, is an ordinary man.

Mumon's poem

*Rather than give the body relief, give relief to the mind:
when the mind is at peace, the body is not distressed.
If mind and body are both set free,
why must the holy saint become a lord?*



10

Seizei, a poor monk





A monk once said to Master Sozan, "I am poor and destitute. I beg you, O Master, please help me and make me rich." Sozan said, "Venerable Seizei!" "Yes, Master," replied Seizei. Sozan remarked, "Having tasted three cups of the best wine of Seigen, do you still say that your lips are not yet moistened?"

Mumon's commentary

Seizei assumed a condescending attitude. What is his intention? Sozan has a penetrating eye and has seen through Seizei's mind. Be that as it may, just tell me how the Venerable Seizei could have drunk the wine.

Mumon's poem

*His poverty is like Hantan's,
his spirit like that of Kou.
With no way of earning a livelihood,
he dares to compete with the richest of men.*

Joshu sees the true nature of two hermits



Joshu came to a hermit and asked, "Are you in? Are you in?" The hermit held up his fist. "The water is too shallow to anchor a vessel," said Joshu, and went away. He then came to another hermit and called out, "Are you in? Are you in?" This hermit also held up his fist. "You are free either to give or to take away, either to kill or to give life," said Joshu, bowing to him.

Mumon's commentary

Both held up their fists. Why did he approve the one and disapprove the other? Tell me, where is the core of the complication? If you can give a turning word on the point, you will see that Joshu is unrestrained in saying what he wants to say and utterly free either to help the one rise up or to push the other down. Be that as it may, do you know that it was Joshu, on the contrary, whose true nature was seen by the two hermits? If you say the one hermit is superior to the other, you have not yet got the Zen eye. Or if you say there is no difference between the two, you have not yet got the Zen eye, either.

Mumon's poem

*His eye is a shooting star,
his spirit is lightning.
A sword to kill,
a sword to give life.*

Zuigan calls “Master”

Every day Master Zuigan Shigen used to call out to himself, “Oh, Master!” and would answer himself, “Yes?” “Are you awake?” he would ask, and would answer, “Yes, I am.” “Never be deceived by others, any day, any time.” “No, I will not.”

Mumon’s commentary

Old Zuigan himself sells and himself buys. He has a lot of masks of goblins and demons to play with. Why? Nii! A calling one, an answering one, an awake one, and one who will not be deceived by others. If you take these different appearances as really existing, you are altogether mistaken. If, however, you would imitate Zuigan, your understanding is that of a fox.

Mumon’s poem

*Those who search for the Way do not realize the Truth,
they only know their old discriminating consciousness.
This is the cause of the endless cycle of birth and death,
yet ignorant people take it for the Original Man*



Tokusan carried his bowls

Tokusan one day came down to the dining room carrying his bowls. Seppo said, "Old Master, the bell has not rung and the drum has not yet been struck. Where are you going with your bowls?" Tokusan at once turned back to his room. Seppo told this incident to Ganto, who remarked, "Great Master though he is, Tokusan has not yet grasped the last word of Zen." Hearing of it, Tokusan sent his attendant to call Ganto in, and asked, "Do you not approve of me?" Ganto whispered his reply to him. Tokusan was satisfied and silent. The next day Tokusan appeared on the rostrum. Sure enough, his talk was different from the usual ones. Ganto came in front of the monastery, laughed heartily, clapping his hands, and said, "What a great joy it is! The old Master has now grasped the last word of Zen. From now on nobody in the world can ever make light of him."

Mumon's commentary

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

Mumon's poem

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





Nansen kills a cat

Once the monks of the Eastern Hall and the Western Hall were disputing about a cat. Nansen, holding up the cat, said, "Monks, if you can say a word of Zen, I will spare the cat. If you cannot, I will kill it!" No monk could answer. Nansen finally killed the cat. In the evening, when Joshu came back, Nansen told him of the incident. Joshu took off his sandal, put it on his head, and walked off. Nansen said, "If you had been there, I could have saved the cat!"

Mumon's commentary

You tell me, what is the real meaning of Joshu's putting his sandal on his head? If you can give the turning words on this point, you will see that Nansen's action was not in vain. If you cannot, beware!

Mumon's poem

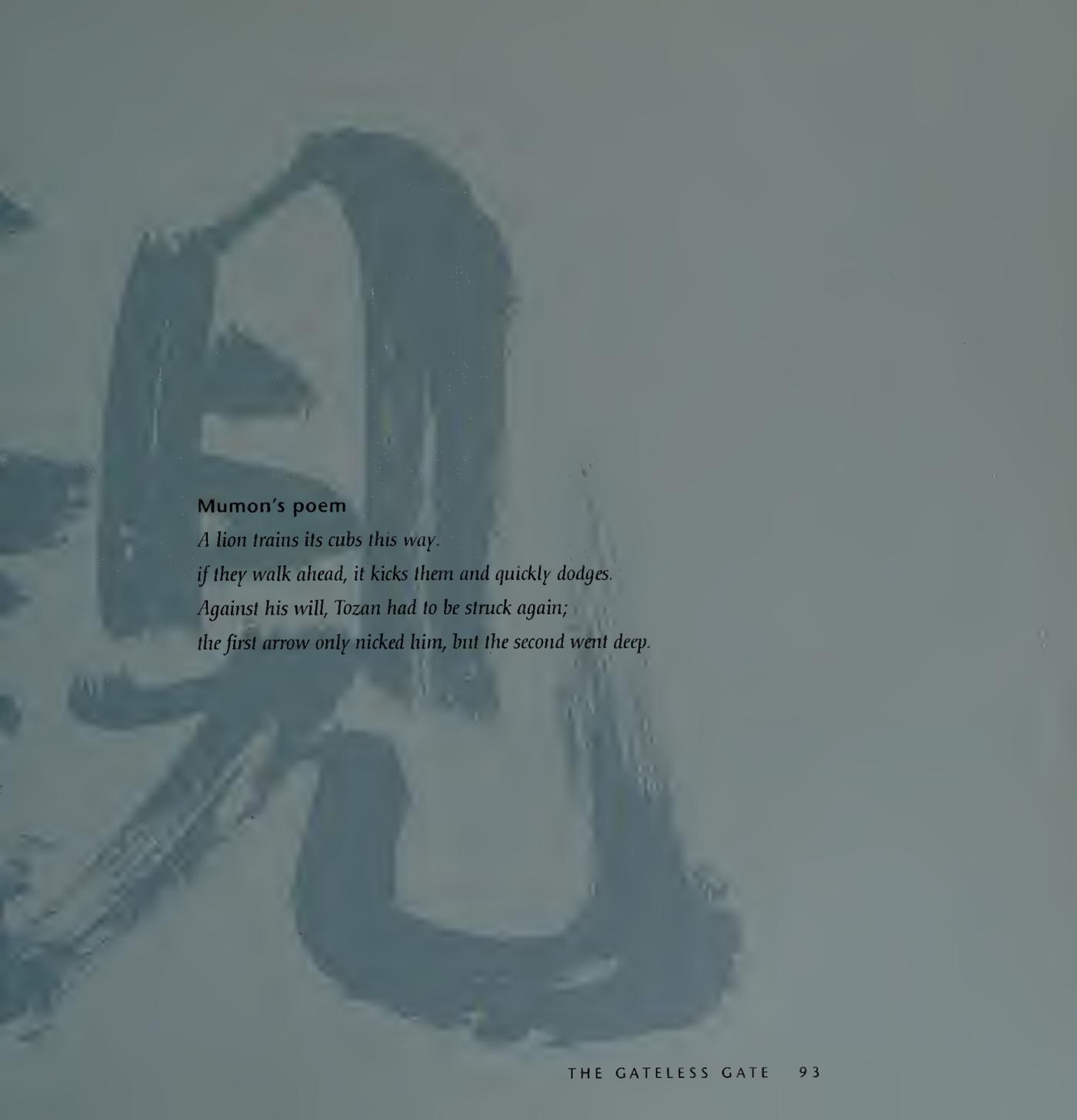
*Had Joshu only been there,
he would have taken action.
Had he snatched the sword away,
Nansen would have begged for his life.*

Tozan gets sixty blows

When Tozan came to have an interview with Unmon, Unmon asked, "Where have you been recently?" "At Sado, Master," Tozan replied. "Where did you stay during the last *ge*-period?" "At Hozu of Konan," replied Tozan. "When did you leave there?" "On the twenty-fifth of August," Tozan answered. Unmon exclaimed, "I give you sixty blows with my stick!" The next day Tozan came up again and asked the Master, "Yesterday you gave me sixty blows with your stick. I do not know where my fault was." Unmon cried out, "You rice-bag! Have you been prowling about like that from Kosei to Konan?" At this Tozan was enlightened.

Mumon's commentary

If Unmon at that time, by giving Tozan the fodder of the Truth, had awakened him to the vivid, dynamic Zen life, Unmon's school would not have declined. In the sea of yes-and-no, Tozan struggled all through the night. When the day broke and he came to see the Master again, Unmon helped him break through. Though Tozan was immediately enlightened, he was not bright enough. Let me ask you, "Should Tozan be beaten, or not?" If you say he ought to be beaten, trees and grasses and everything ought to be beaten. If you say he should not be beaten, then Unmon is telling a falsehood. If you can be clear on this point, you and Tozan will breathe together.



Mumon's poem

*A lion trains its cubs this way.
if they walk ahead, it kicks them and quickly dodges.
Against his will, Tozan had to be struck again;
the first arrow only nicked him, but the second went deep.*



Bell-sound and priest's robe

Unmon said, "Look! This world is vast and wide. Why do you put on your priest's robe at the sound of the bell?"

Mumon's commentary

Now, in studying Zen and disciplining oneself in Zen, one must strictly avoid following sounds and clinging to forms. Even though one may be enlightened by hearing a sound, or have one's mind clarified by seeing a form, this is just a matter of course. It is nothing to talk about, either, if a Zen man is able to master sounds and control forms, and thus can clearly see the reality of everything and is wonderfully free in everything he does. Though it may be so, you tell me, does the sound come to your ear, or does your ear go to the sound? Even if you are able to transcend both sound and silence, how do you speak of that fact? If you listen with your ear, you cannot truly get it. When you hear with your eye, then you can really get it.

Mumon's poem

*If you understand "it," all things are One;
if you do not, they are different and separate.
If you do not understand "it," all things are One;
if you do, they are different and separate.*

The National Teacher calls three times

The National Teacher called to his attendant three times, and the attendant answered three times. The National Teacher said, "I thought I had transgressed against you, but you too had transgressed against me."

法

Mumon's commentary

The National Teacher called three times, and his tongue dropped to the ground. The attendant answered three times, and softening his light, he gave it out. The National Teacher, as he got old and was feeling lonely, pushed the cow's head down to the grass to feed her. The attendant would not simply accept it. Even delicious food cannot attract a full stomach. Now, tell me, how did they transgress?

When the nation is at peace, men of talent are respected;
when the family is well off, the children maintain their status.

Mumon's poem

*An iron collar with no hole, he has to wear it.
It's no easy matter, the trouble passes on to his descendants.
If you want to support the gate and sustain the house,
you must climb a mountain of swords with bare feet.*

Tozan's three pounds of flax

A monk asked Master Tozan, "What is Buddha?" Tozan said, "Three pounds of flax."

Mumon's commentary

Old Tozan studied a bit of clam-Zen, and opening the shell a little, revealed his liver and intestines. Though it may be so, tell me, where do you see Tozan?

Mumon's poem

Thrust forth is "Three pounds of flax!"

Words are intimate, even more so is the mind.

*He who talks about right and wrong
is a man of right and wrong.*

Ordinary mind is Tao

Joshu once asked Nansen, "What is Tao?" Nansen answered, "Ordinary mind is Tao." "Then should we direct ourselves toward it or not?" asked Joshu. "If you try to direct yourself toward it, you go away from it," answered Nansen. Joshu continued, "If we do not try, how can we know that it is Tao?" Nansen replied, "Tao does not belong to knowing or to not-knowing. Knowing is illusion; not-knowing is blankness. If you really attain to Tao of no-doubt, it is like the great void, so vast and boundless. How, then, can there be right and wrong in the Tao?" At these words, Joshu was suddenly enlightened.

Mumon's commentary

Questioned by Joshu, Nansen immediately shows that the tile is disintegrating, the ice is dissolving, and no communication whatsoever is possible. Even though Joshu may be enlightened, he can truly get it only after studying for thirty more years.

Mumon's poem

*Hundreds of flowers in spring, the moon in autumn,
a cool breeze in summer, and snow in winter;
if there is no vain cloud in your mind
for you it is a good season.*



The man of great strength

Master Shogen said, "Why is it that a man of great strength cannot lift his leg?" Again he said, "It is not with his tongue that he speaks."

Mumon's commentary

Of Shogen it must be said that he emptied his intestines and turned his belly out. Yet no one understands it. Even though there is a man who immediately understands it, I will give him severe blows with my stick if he comes to me. Why? Nii! If you want to know pure gold, see it in the midst of fire.

Mumon's poem

*Lifting his leg he kicks up the Scented Ocean,
lowering his head he looks down on the Four Dhyana Heavens.
There is no place to put this gigantic body.
You please add another line.*

Unmon's shit-stick

A monk asked Unmon, "What is Buddha?" Unmon said, "A shit-stick!"
(*Kan-shiketsu!*)

Mumon's commentary

Of Unmon it must be said that he is so poor that he cannot prepare even plain food; he is so busy that he cannot write properly. Very likely they may bring out the shit-stick to support the gate. The outcome is just obvious.

Mumon's poem

*A flash of lightning!
Sparks struck from a flint!
If you blink your eye
it is gone.*



Kasho and a flagpole

Ananda once said to Kasho, "The World-Honored One transmitted to you the brocade robe. What else did he transmit to you?" Kasho called out, "Ananda!" Ananda answered, "Yes, sir." Kasho said, "Pull down the flagpole at the gate."

Mumon's commentary

If you can give the exact turning word to this koan, you will see that the meeting at Mount Grdhrakuta is definitely present here. If not, then know that Vipasyin Buddha is still unable to get the Truth even though he began his seeking in remote antiquity.

Mumon's poem

*The calling out is good, but even better the answering.
How many are there who have opened their true eyes?
The elder brother calling out, the younger brother replying,
the family shame is revealed.
This is the spring that does not belong to Yin and Yang.*

Think neither good nor evil

The Sixth Patriarch was once pursued by the monk Myo to Daiyurei. The Patriarch, seeing Myo coming, laid the robe and bowl on a stone, and said, "This robe symbolizes faith; how can it be fought for by force? I will leave it to you to take it." Myo tried to take up the robe, but it was as immovable as a mountain. Myo was terrified and hesitated. He said, "I have come for Dharma, not for the robe. I beg you, please teach me, O lay brother!" The Sixth Patriarch said, "Think neither good nor evil. At such a moment, what is the True Self of Monk Myo?" At this, Myo was at once enlightened. His whole body was dripping with sweat. With tears he made a bow and asked, "Beside these secret words and meanings, is there any further significance or not?" The Patriarch said, "What I have just told you is not secret. If you will realize your True Self, what is secret is in you-yourself." Myo said,



"Although at Obai I followed other monks in training, I did not awaken to my True Self. Thanks to your instruction, which is to the point, I am like one who has drunk water and actually experienced himself whether it is cold or warm. You are really my teacher, lay brother!" The Patriarch said, "if you are so awakened, both you and I have Obai as our teacher. Live up to your attainment with care."

Mumon's commentary

Of the Sixth Patriarch it has to be said that in an emergency he did something extraordinary. He has a grandmotherly kindness; it is as if he had peeled a fresh litchi, removed its seed, and then put it into your mouth so that you need only swallow it.

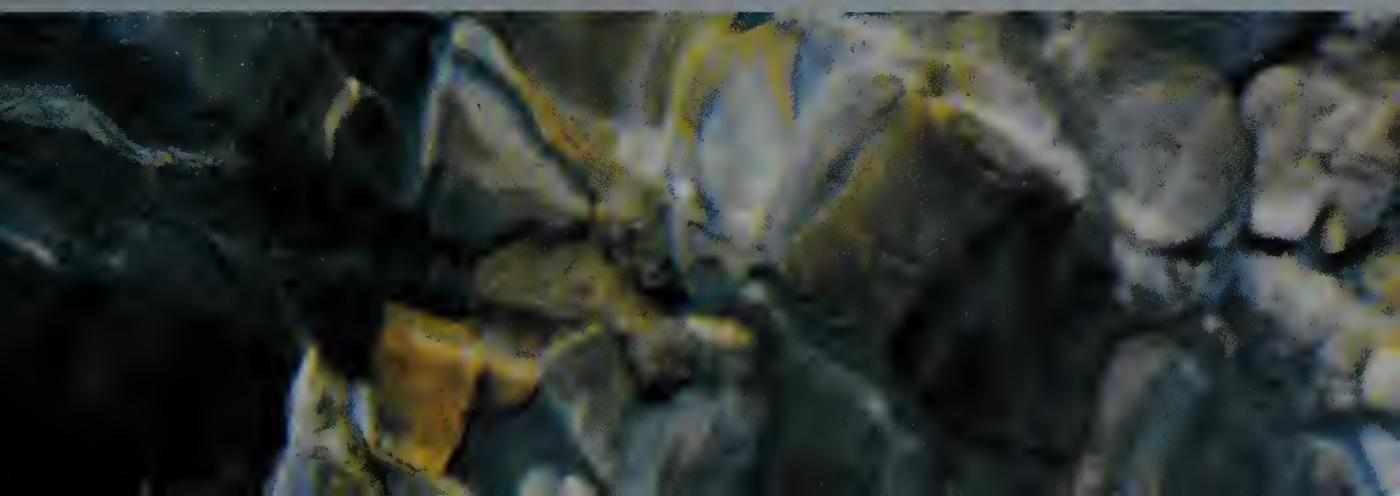
Mumon's poem

*You may describe it, but in vain, picture it,
but to no avail.*

*You can never praise it full: stop all your groping
and maneuvering.*

There is nowhere to hide the True Self.

When the world collapses, "it" is indestructible.



Abandon words and speaking

A monk once asked Master Fuketsu, "Both speaking and silence are concerned with *ri-bi* relativity. How can we be free and nontransgressing?" Fuketsu said,

"How fondly I remember Konan in March!

The partridges are calling, and the flowers are fragrant."

Mumon's commentary

Fuketsu's Zen works like lightning. He has his way and marches along. But why does he rely on the tongue of the ancient poet and does not get rid of it? If you can clearly see into this point, you may attain absolute freedom. Abandon words and speaking, and say a word!

Mumon's poem

*He used no high-flown words;
before the mouth is opened, "it" is revealed.
If you keep on chattering glibly,
know you will never get "it."*

三昧

Talk by the monk of the third seat



Master Gyozan had a dream. He went to Maitreya's place and was given the third seat. A venerable monk there struck the table with a gavel and announced, "Today the talk will be given by the monk of the third seat." Gyozan struck the table with the gavel and said, "The Dharma of Mahayana goes beyond the Four Propositions and transcends the One Hundred Negations. Listen carefully!"

Mumon's commentary

Tell me, did he give a talk or did he not? If you open your mouth, you will lose "it." If you shut your mouth, you will also miss "it". Even if you neither open nor shut your mouth, you are a hundred and eight thousand miles away.

Mumon's poem

Broad daylight under the blue sky!

In a dream he talks of a dream.

Humbug! Humbug!

He deceived the whole audience.

Two monks rolled up the bamboo blinds

The monks gathered in the hall to hear the Great Hogen of Seiryō give *teishō* before the midday meal. Hogen pointed to the bamboo blinds. At this two monks went to the blinds, and rolled them up alike. Hogen said, "One has it; the other has not."

Mumon's commentary

Tell me, which one has it and which one has not? If you have your Zen eye opened at this point, you will then know how Master Seiryō failed. Be that as it may, you are strictly warned against arguing about "has" and "has not."

Mumon's poem

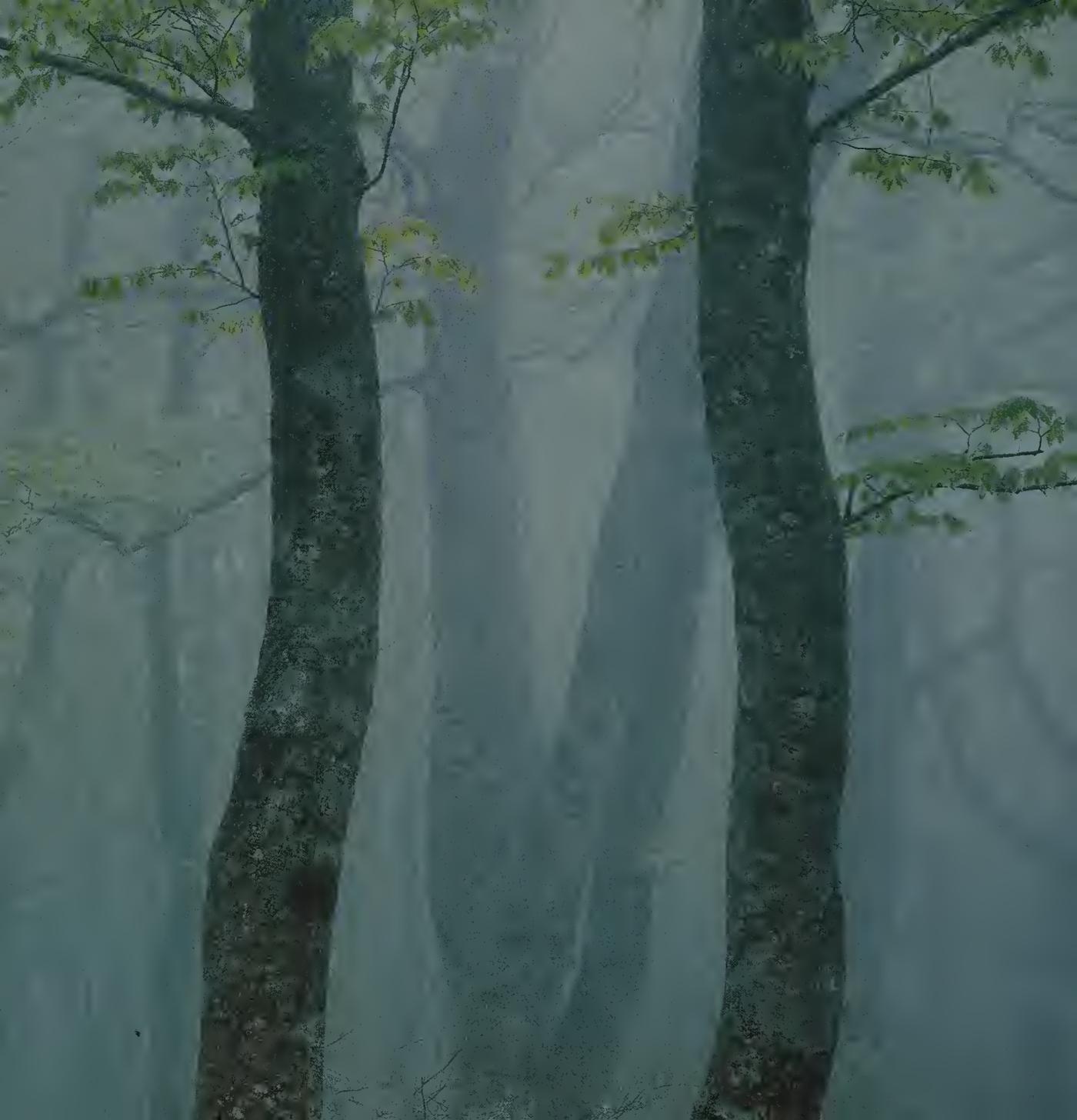
When they are rolled up, bright and clear is the great emptiness.

The great emptiness does not yet come up to our teaching.

Why don't you cast away emptiness and everything?

Then it is so lucid and perfect that even the wind does not pass through.





Neither mind nor Buddha

A monk once asked Master Nansen, "Is there any Dharma that has not yet been taught to the people?" Nansen said, "Yes, there is." The monk asked, "What is the Dharma that has not been taught to the people?" Nansen said, "It is neither mind, nor Buddha, nor beings."

Mumon's commentary

Nansen, being asked the question, had to use up all his resources at once. How feeble and awkward!

Mumon's poem

*Too much courtesy impairs your virtue;
silence is certainly effective.
Let it be so. Even if the blue ocean should change,
"it" will never be communicated to you.*



Well-known Ryutan

Tokusan once called on Ryutan to ask for instruction and stayed until night fell. Ryutan said, "It is getting late; you had better leave." At last Tokusan said good-bye, lifted up the door curtain, and went out. Noticing that it was dark, he turned back and said, "It is dark outside." Ryutan thereupon lit a candle and handed it to him. Tokusan was about to take it when Ryutan blew it out. At this Tokusan was all of a sudden enlightened. He made a bow. Ryutan asked, "What realization do you have?" Tokusan replied, "From now on I will not doubt the sayings of any of the great Zen Masters in the world."

The next day Ryutan mounted the rostrum and declared, "Among the monks here there is a fellow whose fangs are like swords, and whose mouth is like a bowl of blood. You may strike him with a stick but he will not turn his head. Some day in the future, he will establish his way on a steep and lofty peak."

Tokusan then took out his notes and commentaries on the *Diamond Sutra*, and in front of the monastery hall he held up a burning torch and said, "Even though one masters various profound philosophies, it is like placing a single strand of hair in the great sky; even if one gains all the essential knowledge in the world, it is like throwing a drop of water into a deep ravine." Taking up his notes and commentaries, he burned them all. Then he left with gratitude.

Mumon's commentary

When Tokusan had not yet left his home, his mind was indignant and his tongue sharp. He confidently came to the south in order to exterminate the "special transmission outside scriptures." When he reached the road to Reishu, he talked to an old woman who sold *tenjin*. The old woman said, "Venerable Monk, what books do you carry in your box?" Tokusan said, "They are notes and commentaries on the *Diamond Sutra*." The old woman said, "It is said in the *sutra* that 'the past mind is unattainable; the present mind is unattainable; the future mind is unattainable.' Which mind, Venerable Monk, are you going to light up?" Tokusan was unable to answer this question and had to shut his mouth tight. Even so, he could not die the Great Death at the old woman's words, and finally asked, "Is there a Zen Master in the neighborhood?" The old woman replied, "Master Ryutan lives five miles away." Arriving at Ryutan's monastery, he was completely defeated. It has to be said that his former words and his latter words do not agree. Ryutan is like the mother who, because she loves her child too much, does not realize how meddlesome she herself is. Finding a little piece of live coal in Tokusan, he quickly poured muddy water over him. Looking at it calmly, I would say that the whole story is just a farce.

Mumon's poem

*Far better seeing the face than hearing the name;
far better hearing the name than seeing the face.
Though he saved his nose,
alas, he has lost his eyes!*

Neither the wind nor the flag

The wind was flapping a temple flag. Two monks were arguing about it. One said the flag was moving; the other said the wind was moving. Arguing back and forth they could come to no agreement. The Sixth Patriarch said, "It is neither the wind nor the flag that is moving. It is your mind that is moving." The two monks were struck with awe.

Mumon's commentary

It is neither the wind nor the flag nor the mind that is moving. Where do you see the heart of the Patriarch? If you can see clearly, you will know that the two monks obtained gold intending to buy iron. Also you will know that the Patriarch could not repress his compassion and made an awkward scene.

Mumon's poem

*The wind moves, the flag moves, the mind moves:
all of them missed it.
Though he knows how to open his mouth,
he does not see he was caught by words.*

Mind is Buddha

Taibai once asked Baso, "What is Buddha?" Baso answered, "Mind is Buddha."

Mumon's commentary

If you can at once grasp "it," you are wearing Buddha clothes, eating Buddha food, speaking Buddha words, and living Buddha life; you are a Buddha yourself. Though this may be so, Taibai has misled a number of people and let them trust a scale with a stuck pointer. Don't you know that one has to rinse out his mouth for three days if he has uttered the word "Buddha"? If he is a real Zen man, he will stop his ears and rush away when he hears "Mind is Buddha."

Mumon's poem

A fine day under the blue sky!

Don't foolishly look here and there.

If you still ask "What is Buddha?"

it is like pleading your innocence while clutching stolen goods.

Joshu saw through the old woman

A monk asked an old woman, "Which way should I take to Mount Gotai?" The old woman said, "Go straight on!" When the monk had taken a few steps, she remarked, "He may look like a fine monk, but he too goes off like that!" Later a monk told Joshu about it. Joshu said, "Wait a while. I will go and see through that old woman for you." The next day off he went, and asked her the same question. The old woman gave him the same reply. When he returned, Joshu announced to the monks, "I have seen through the old woman of Mount Gotai for you."

Mumon's commentary

The old woman knew how to work out a strategy and win the victory while sitting in her tent. Yet she is not aware of the bandit stealing into the tent. Old Joshu is skillful enough to creep into the enemy's camp and menace their fortress. Yet he does not look like a grown-up. Upon close examination, they are both at fault. Now tell me, how did Joshu see through the old woman?

Mumon's poem

*The question is the same each time,
the answer, too, is the same.
In the rice there is sand,
in the mud there are thorns.*

A non-Buddhist questions the Buddha

A non-Buddhist once asked the World-Honored One, "I do not ask for words, nor do I ask for no-words." The World-Honored One remained seated. The non-Buddhist praised him, saying, "The great compassion of the World-Honored One has dispelled the clouds of my ignorance and enabled me to be enlightened." Making a bow of gratitude, he departed. Ananda then asked Buddha, "What realization did the non-Buddhist have that made him praise you like that?" The World-Honored One replied, "He is like a high-mettled horse which starts at even the shadow of the whip."

Mumon's commentary

Ananda is Buddha's disciple, yet his understanding falls far short of the non-Buddhist's. Now tell me, how different are they, the Buddha's disciple and the non-Buddhist?

Mumon's poem,

*He walks along the edge of a sword
and runs over the sharp ridges of an ice floe.
You need take no steps,
let go your hold on the cliff!*

No mind, no Buddha

A monk once asked Baso, "What is Buddha?" Baso answered, "No mind, no Buddha."

Mumon's commentary

If you can see into it here, your Zen study has been completed.

Mumon's poem

*If you meet a swordsman in the street, give him a sword;
unless you meet a poet, do not offer a poem.
In talking to people, tell them three quarters only,
never let them have the other part.*



Wisdom is not Tao

Nansen said, "Mind is not Buddha; wisdom is not Tao."

Mumon's commentary

Of Nansen it has to be said that on getting old he was lost to shame.
Just opening his stinking mouth a little, he reveals his family shame.
Even so, only a very few feel grateful for it.

Mumon's poem

*The sky is clear and the sun appears;
rain falls and the earth is moistened.
Without restraint he has explained everything,
yet how few are able to grasp it!*

Sen-jo and her soul are separated

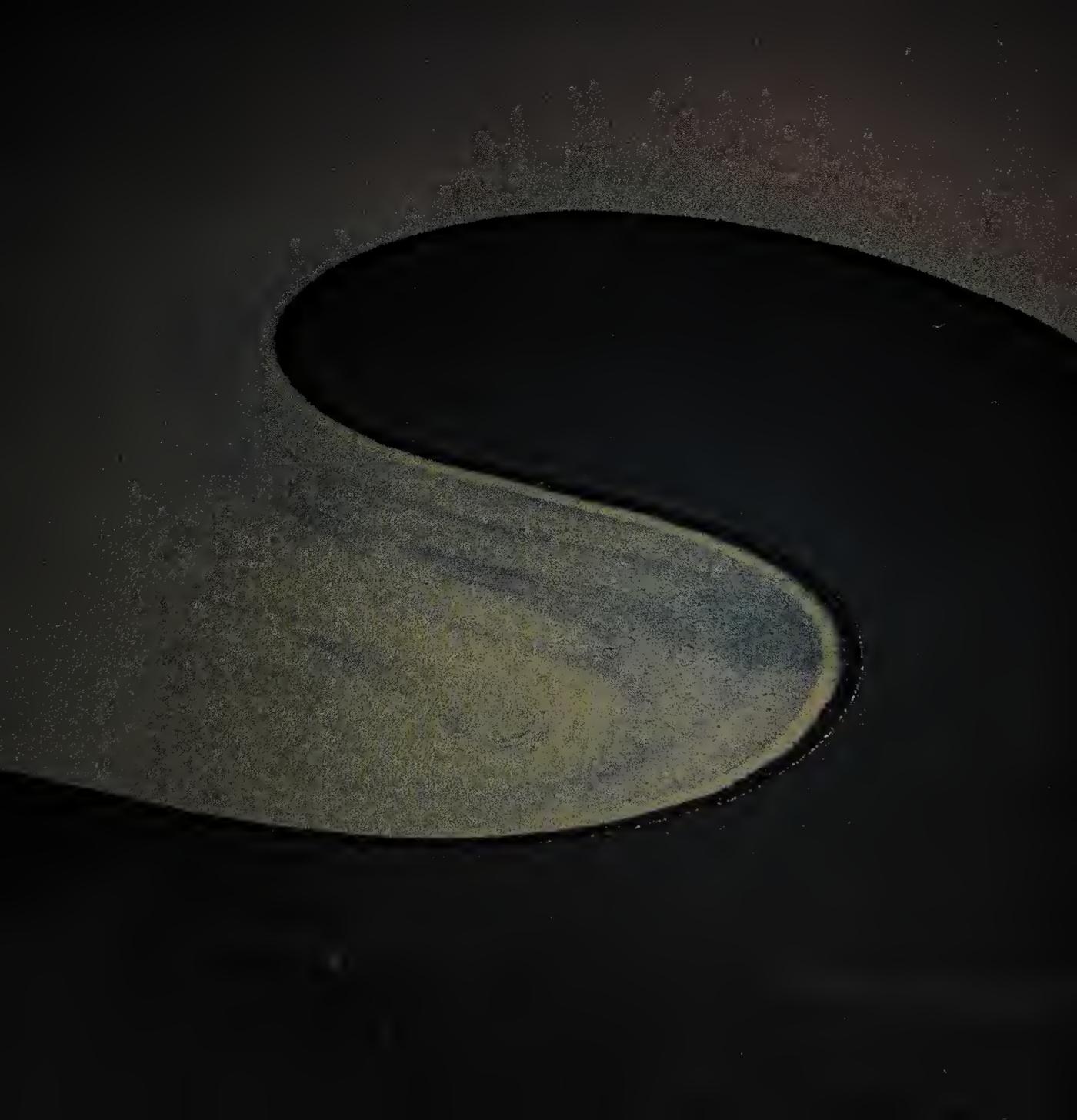
Goso asked a monk, "Sen-jo and her soul are separated: which is the true one?"

Mumon's commentary

If you are enlightened in the truth of this koan, you will then know that coming out of one husk and getting into another is like a traveler's putting up in hotels. In case you are not yet enlightened, do not rush about blindly. When suddenly earth, water, fire, and air are decomposed, you will be like a crab fallen into boiling water, struggling with its seven arms and eight legs. Do not say then that I have not warned you.

Mumon's poem

*Ever the same, the moon among the clouds;
different from each other, the mountain and the valley.
How wonderful! How blessed!
Is this one, or two?*



Meeting a man of Tao on the way

Goso said, "If you meet a man of Tao on the way, greet him neither with words nor with silence. Now tell me, how will you greet him?"

Mumon's commentary

If you can give an apt answer to the question, it certainly is a matter for congratulation. If you are not yet able to give one, be alert in every aspect of your life.

Mumon's poem

*If you meet a man of Tao on the way,
greet him neither with words nor with silence.
I'll give him with my fist the hardest blow I can—
get it at once, get it immediately!*

The oak tree in the front garden

A monk once asked Joshu, "What is the meaning of the Patriarch's coming from the West?" Joshu answered, "The oak tree in the front garden."

Mumon's commentary

If you can firmly grasp the essence of Joshu's answer, for you there is no Sakyamuni in the past and no Maitreya in the future.

Mumon's poem

*Words do not convey actualities;
letters do not embody the spirit of the mind.
He who attaches himself to words is lost;
he who abides with letters will remain in ignorance.*

A buffalo passes through a window

Goso said, "To give an example, it is like a buffalo passing through a window. Its head, horns, and four legs have all passed through. Why is it that its tail cannot?"

Mumon's commentary

If you can penetrate to the point of this koan, open your Zen eye to it, and give a turning word to it, you will then be able to repay the four obligations above and help the three existences below. If you still cannot do so, work with the tail singleheartedly until you can really grasp it as your own.

Mumon's poem

*If it passes through, it falls into a ditch;
if it turns back, it is destroyed.
This tiny tail,
how extremely marvelous!*

Unmon says "You have missed it!"

A monk once wanted to ask Unmon a question and started to say, "The light serenely shines over the whole universe." Before he had even finished the first line, Unmon suddenly interrupted, "Isn't that the poem of Chosetsu Shusai?" The monk answered, "Yes, it is." Unmon said, "You have missed it!"

Later Master Shishin took up this koan and said, "Now tell me, why has this monk missed it?"

Mumon's commentary

In this koan, if you can grasp how lofty and unapproachable Unmon's Zen working is, and why the monk missed it, then you can be a teacher in heaven and on earth. In case you are not yet clear about it, you will be unable to save yourself.

Mumon's poem

*A line is dropped in a swift stream;
greedy for the bait, he is caught.
If you open your mouth only a little,
your life is lost!*

Kicking over the pitcher

When Master Isan was studying under Hyakujo, he worked as a *tenzo* at the monastery. Hyakujo wanted to choose an abbot for Daii Monastery. He told the head monk and all the rest of his disciples to make their Zen presentations, and the ablest one would be sent to found the monastery. Then Hyakujo took a pitcher, placed it on the floor, and asked the question: "This must not be called a pitcher. What do you call it?" The head monk said, "It cannot be called a wooden sandal." Hyakujo then asked Isan. Isan walked up, kicked over the pitcher, and left. Hyakujo said, "The head monk has been defeated by Isan." So Isan was ordered to start the monastery.

Mumon's commentary

Extremely valiant though he is, Isan could not after all jump out of Hyakujo's trap. Upon careful examination, he followed what is heavy, refusing what is light. Why? Nii! Taking the towel band from his head, he put on an iron yoke.

Mumon's poem

*Throwing away bamboo baskets and wooden ladles,
with a direct blow he cuts off complications.*

Hyakujo tries to stop him with his strict barrier, but in vain.

The tip of his foot creates innumerable Buddhas.



Bodhidharma and peace of mind

Bodhidharma sat in *zazen* facing the wall. The Second Patriarch, who had been standing in the snow, cut off his arm and said, "Your disciple's mind is not yet at peace. I beg you, my teacher, please give it peace." Bodhidharma said, "Bring the mind to me, and I will set it at rest." The Second Patriarch said, "I have searched for the mind, and it is finally unattainable." Bodhidharma said, "I have thoroughly set it at rest for you."

Mumon's commentary

The broken-toothed old foreigner proudly came over—a hundred thousand miles across the sea. This was as if he were raising waves where there was no wind. Toward his end, Bodhidharma could enlighten only one disciple, but even he was crippled. *Ii!* Shasanro does not know even four characters.

Mumon's poem

*Coming from the West, and directly pointing—
this great affair was caused by the transmission.*

*The trouble-maker who created a stir in Zen circles
is, after all, you.*

A woman comes out of meditation

Once long long ago, the World-Honored One came to the place where many Buddhas were assembled. When Manjusri arrived there, the Buddhas all returned to their original places. Only a woman remained, close to the Buddha seat in deep meditation. Manjusri spoke to the Buddha, "Why can a woman be close to the Buddha seat, and I cannot?" The Buddha told Manjusri, "You awaken this woman from her meditation and ask her yourself." Manjusri walked around the woman three times, snapped his fingers once, then took her up to the Brahma Heaven and tried all his supernatural powers, but he was unable to bring her out of meditation. The World-Honored One said, "Even hundreds of thousands of Manjusris would be unable to bring her out of meditation. Down below, past one billion, two hundred million countries, as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges, there is a Bodhisattva called Momyo. He will be able to awaken her from meditation." In an instant Momyo emerged from the earth and worshiped the World-Honored One. The World-Honored One gave him the order. Momyo then walked to the woman and snapped his fingers only once. At this the woman came out of her meditation.

Mumon's commentary

Old Sakya put on a clumsy play and was no better than a child. Now tell me: Manjusri is the teacher of the Seven Buddhas; why could he not bring the woman out of her meditation? Momyo is a Bodhisattva of the initial stage; why could he do so? If you can firmly grasp this point, then for you this busy life of ignorance and discrimination will be the life of supreme *satori*.

Mumon's poem

The one could awaken her, the other could not;

both are completely free.

A god mask and a devil mask,

the failure is wonderful indeed.

Shuzan and a staff

Master Shuzan held up his staff, and showing it to the assembled disciples said, "You monks, if you call this a staff, you are committed to the name. If you call it not-a-staff, you negate the fact. Tell me, you monks, what do you call it?"

Mumon's commentary

If you call it a staff, you are committed to the name. If you call it not-a-staff, you negate the fact. You cannot talk; you cannot be silent. Quick! Speak! Speak! Quick!

Mumon's poem

*Holding up a staff,
he is carrying out the orders to kill and to revive.
Where committing and negating are interfusing,
Buddhas and Patriarchs have to beg for their lives.*

Basho and a stick

Master Basho said to the monks, "If you have a stick, I shall give one to you. If you do not have a stick, I shall take it away from you."

Mumon's commentary

It helps you cross the river where the bridge is broken. It accompanies you as you return to the village on a moonless night. If you call it a stick, you will go to hell as fast as an arrow.

Mumon's poem

*The deep and the shallow wherever they may be
are all in my hand.*

*It sustains heaven and supports the earth,
and promotes Zen Truth wherever it may be.*



Who is he?

Our Patriarch Master Hoen of Tozan said, "Sakyamuni and Maitreya are but his servants. Now tell me, who is he?"

Mumon's commentary

If you can see him and are absolutely clear about him, it will be like coming upon your own father at the crossroads. You do not have to ask someone else whether you are correct or incorrect in recognizing him as your father.

Mumon's poem

*Do not draw another man's bow;
do not ride another man's horse;
do not defend another man's fault;
do not inquire into another man's affairs.*





Step forward from the top of a pole

Master Sekiso said, "From the top of a pole one hundred feet high, how do you step forward?" An ancient Master also said that one sitting at the top of a pole one hundred feet high, even if he has attained "it," has not yet been truly enlightened. He must step forward from the top of the pole one hundred feet high and manifest his whole body in the ten directions.

Mumon's commentary

If you can step forward and turn back, is there anything you dislike as unworthy? But even so, tell me, from the top of a pole one hundred feet high, how do you step forward? *Sah!*

Mumon's poem

*The eye in the forehead has gone blind,
and he has been misled by the stuck pointer on the scale.
He has thrown away his body and laid down his life—
a blind man is leading other blind men.*

Tosotsu's three barriers

Master Juetsu of Tosotsu made three barriers to test monks.

To inquire after the Truth, groping your way through the underbrush, is for the purpose of seeing into your nature. Here, now, where is your nature, Venerable Monk?

If you realize your own nature, you certainly are free from life and death. When your eyes are closed, how can you be free from life and death?

If you are free from life and death, you know where you will go. When the four elements are decomposed, where do you go?

Mumon's commentary

If you can rightly give the three turning words here, you will be the master wherever you may be, and live up to the Dharma no matter how varied the circumstances. If, however, you are unable to give them, I warn you, you will get tired of the food you have bolted, and well-chewed food keeps hunger away.

Mumon's poem

This one instant, as it is, is an infinite number of kalpas.

An infinite number of kalpas are at the same time this one instant.

If you see into this fact,

the True Self which is seeing has been seen into.



Kempo's one way

A monk once asked Master Kempo, "The Bhagavats of the ten directions have one way to Nirvana. I wonder where this one way is." Kempo held up his stick, drew a line, and said, "Here it is!"

Later the monk asked Unmon for his instruction on this *mondo*. Unmon held up his fan and said, "This fan has jumped up to the Thirty-third Heaven and hit the nose of the deity there. The carp of the Eastern Sea leaps, and it rains cats and dogs."

Mumon's commentary

The one goes to the bottom of the deep sea and raises a cloud of sand and dust. The other stands on the top of a towering mountain and raises foaming waves to touch the sky. The one holds, the other lets go, and each, using only one hand, sustains the teachings of Zen. What they do is exactly like two children who come running from opposite directions and crash into each other. In the world there is hardly anyone who has truly awakened. From the absolute point of view, the two great Masters do not really know where the way is.

Mumon's poem

*Before taking a step you have already arrived.
Before moving your tongue you have finished teaching,
even if at each step you may be ahead of him,
know there is still another way up.*

