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Beyond Awareness

Tōrei Enji's Understanding of Realization in the *Treatise on the Inexhaustible Lamp of Zen*, Chapter 6

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The *Treatise on the Inexhaustible Lamp of Zen* (*Shūmon mujintō ron*) is one of the few manuals describing the core of meditation in the Rinzai tradition. The author of this treatise, Tōrei Enji (1721–1792), was a disciple of the more famous Hakuin Ekaku (1686–1769) who contributed to the Rinzai revival of the eighteenth century. According to tradition, Tōrei wrote his treatise in 1751 as a spiritual testament when he believed himself to be fatally ill. He survived, however, and revised the work for forty years; it was not published until after his death.

Among the different Zen approaches, the Rinzai denomination tends to put more emphasis on the use of kōans, verbal devices used to realize one's true nature (*kenshō*) and to refine this insight. Tōrei's treatise describes the successive stages of the Zen path in ten chapters that emphasize the importance of kōan practice under the supervision of a reliable teacher, while showing how this relates to other Buddhist and non-Buddhist teachings. The audience (it was first delivered as lectures) and readership Tōrei had in mind was made up of practitioners, mostly monks and nuns, with some laypersons. These practitioners were already focusing on kōans and therefore needed little explanation concerning their contents or justification of their value. Addressing practitioners, the treatise often has an exhortative tone, sometimes challenging the reader to overcome a partial understanding of the teachings.

The translation provided below includes approximately two thirds of the crucial sixth chapter of Tōrei's treatise that deals with "going beyond" (*kōjō*) a first insight into spiritual realization.¹ In this chapter Tōrei argues that the first realization of one's true nature and the awareness² it triggers must be overcome until all traces of the initial breakthrough have disappeared. He describes this ongoing process as the full "integration" of the initial insight into all activities.

Because the following selection concerns an advanced stage of Zen practice, it belies a common misunderstanding of Zen "awakening." This misunderstanding, widely circulated in the West, holds that the goal of Rinzai Zen is attaining "Satori," a sudden enlightenment which corresponds to the release from suffering described in Buddhist scriptures. For Tōrei, in contrast, the purpose of Zen practice is *not* the initial insight into one's true nature, although it is the necessary first opening of the spiritual eye. In this text, Tōrei repeatedly emphasizes the fact that his tradition does not aim exclusively at attaining an initial awareness of one's own Buddha nature, but instead values the necessity of going beyond this awareness without ever clinging to it. Thus, the single theme that pervades Tōrei's treatise is the necessity to go beyond all temporary spiritual accomplishments.

The following selection includes a discussion of language and presents several examples of encounter dialogues between teacher and student in which kōans are used. Tōrei provides vivid depictions of struggles involved in the emancipation³ process. Kōans serve as verbal devices used to deconstruct previous convictions or habits of thinking, with the important proviso that they are also words. In the prologue to his *Treatise*, Tōrei warns the reader: "Although words and written characters are the source of emancipation, they are also the source of bondage. If it doesn't encounter the proper person at the proper moment, the finest ghee turns into poison." Thus, using kōans as an antidote is like using an enemy's weapon against him, with all the dangers this involves.⁴

1. The selection translated here corresponds to the original text in classical Chinese found in the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, the standard collection of the East Asian Buddhist canon edited by Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaikyoku, et al., 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932, vol. 81, no 2575, pp. 592a–594b. The paragraphs 7–20 that have been omitted correspond to pp. 592b24–593c14.

2. Concerning the precise meaning given here to "awareness," see Mohr 2000, pp. 259–260.

3. Emancipation is a rendering of *gedatsu* (Skt. *mokṣa*), which indicates release from suffering and ultimate spiritual freedom.

4. Much of Tōrei's *Treatise* was translated into English (Okuda 1990). For a complete French translation see Mohr 1997.

Translation: Going Beyond

1. The Crucial Element

Here the direct path to the freedom of going beyond remains [to be realized]. It is said to be the decisive move that patriarchs cannot transmit.^{5,6} This is why Panshan says:

“The direct path of going beyond is not transmitted by the thousand sages. Practitioners wearing out their body are like monkeys trying to catch the reflection [of the moon].”⁷

This path is also called the last word. Fushan says:

“Only with the last word one reaches the outer gate of the prison.⁸ The purpose of the teachings is not found in verbal devices.”⁹

Thus far all the direct transmissions received from the Buddhas and patriarchs consist of this decisive move. Although they in fact have exhausted their search for obscure subtleties, penetrated the successive barriers [of kōans], and thoroughly examined the difficult cases related to going beyond, clerics still [often] completely miss this crucial element [of the last word].¹⁰ This stems from the shallowness of their vow of compassion, the lack of aims in their resolution, the lack of intensity in their [ability to feel] remorse, and the lack of thoroughness in their questioning. Thus they remain stuck in their old ways.¹¹

5. Paragraph headings have been added to make the text more accessible, but they are not part of the original treatise.

6. The “decisive move” (*ichijakusu*) is an expression coming from the Chinese chess game.

7. Panshan Baoji (n.d.) was a successor of Mazu Daoyi (709–788), who dwelt on Mount Pan, southeast of present-day Beijing.

8. Fushan Fayuan (991–1067) is also known by his nickname, “jurist Yuan.” The “last word” (*matsugo no ikku*) is a metaphor referring to the ultimate word uttered at the time of physical death. The “outer gate of the prison” (*rōkan*) renders an expression that plays on several images: a prison, as metaphor for bondage to life and death, a strategic checkpoint or a roadblock (*sekisho*).

9. Verbal devices (*gonsen*) are words considered as “traps.” See the metaphor of the fish trap in *Zhuangzi* 26.

10. This crucial element (*kono shashi no ji*), literally “this little thing”—a euphemism for the point Tōrei wants to make.

11. The word used for “the old ways” (*kyū kakutsu ri*) literally indicates the “nest” of a bird or the “den” of an animal. Other renderings of the same expression could be “habits” or “stereotyped patterns.”

2. Three Models

This is why in the past master Shōichi¹² established the three models of Richi (reaching the principle), Kikan (dynamic device), and Kōjō (going beyond), precisely to remedy this problem. [However,] after the Middle Age [people started] analyzing [classical] utterances, classifying each of them according to those [three categories] and thus only interpreting them in a superficial manner.

What tends to be ignored is that the essence of Kenshō (seeing one's true nature) is reaching the principle; the numerous enigmatic utterances of Buddhas and patriarchs are essentially dynamic devices; and the decisive move of going beyond suggests that the [true] way of life is different. What makes our Zen tradition superior to other traditions is precisely the transmission of this crucial element.¹³ If it were sufficient just to have realized one's true nature, why would we need to establish our tradition as a separate one?

3. The Buddha's Disciples

It should have been easy for those members of the congregation on the Vulture Peak!¹⁴ Having developed considerable experience in their practice, all of them had fully realized the nature and characteristics of both principle and phenomena. How could one pretend that their spiritual realization and understanding was inferior? One should clearly recognize that [one's understanding] is not even remotely comparable to theirs.

Since [the Buddha's disciples] had already reached such a level, then for what reason was Mahākāśyapa the only one to break into a subtle smile? Ānanda had been the Buddha's assistant for thirty years, not to mention the fact that during the Śūraṅgama assembly he had reached an extremely deep awakening. Nevertheless, he could not understand. Why did he need to consult Mahākāśyapa before receiving this Dharma?

4. Today's Level

Today's practitioners, believing this to be easy, neglect examining these ancient facts, and after flirting with some practices of Zen [proceed to] waste

12. Enni Bennen (1202–1280), the founder of Tōfukuji, whose honorific name is Shōichi Kokushi.

13. "Our Zen tradition" (*waga zenshū*) indicates both the lineage and the principles inherited by Tōrei. In premodern texts "*Zenshū*" was never understood as a religious institution or a "denomination."

14. The Vulture Peak is the location where the historical Buddha is supposed to have once given a decisive teaching by remaining silent and holding a flower in front of the assembly. None of his listeners understood, except Mahākāśyapa, who acknowledged him by smiling. This smile of complicity and the ensuing silent transmission are regarded in the tradition as the origin of Zen.

away their whole existence.¹⁵ How sad that the unique tradition of Bodhidharma is getting wiped out in one fell swoop! Sometimes [these practitioners] say: “as in the Bodhidharma tradition we directly focus on the human heart, see our true nature, and realize Buddhahood, so what is the need for another principle aside from seeing one’s own true nature?”

This is not entirely wrong, but what a pity [it misses the essential point]! You say that everything in the Bodhidharma tradition can be reduced only to the teaching of seeing one’s true nature. Then for what reason did he make a distinction between [the disciples who had obtained] his skin, his flesh, his bones, and his marrow?¹⁶ Why would he have cheated the people [in this way]?

5. Baizhang’s Practice

When Baizhang’s nose got twisted by Mazu, he clearly realized [his true nature]. Why, then, is there a case that deals with his second encounter [with Mazu]?¹⁷

Baizhang taught his disciples:

“The Buddha Dharma is no small task. In the past I endured one shout from Mazu and consequently remained deaf for three days.”

While staying at the Platform Temple in Jiangning, Zhang Wujin read *Xuedou’s Commentaries on Ancient Cases*.¹⁸ Reaching the passage concerning Baizhang’s second encounter with Mazu, he read [Xuedou’s comments], “pure gold [cast by a] skilled smith should not change its color.”

[Zhang] immediately threw the book away exclaiming “if we examine this in detail, if [Xuedou] was right, how could the Linji [tradition] have reached its present [success]?”

He composed these verses:

“The one shout by Mazu [produced] Daxiong Peak¹⁹
His voice penetrated [Baizhang’s] skull, deafening him for three days
Huangbo heard this [story] and clicked his tongue in awe
From there the Jiangxi style [of Chan] was established.”

15. “Flirting with some practice of Zen” (*kyota no zen ni sanzū*), or “consulting a few Zen [teachers].” The vernacular expression *kyota* suggests the random character of this activity.

16. Alludes to a relatively late legend about Bodhidharma’s choice of a successor. See chapter 13 here.

17. This case, called “Baizhang’s second encounter [with Mazu]” (*Hyakujōsaisan*), is a *kōan* belonging to the “going beyond” type. See Kirchner 2004: 98–99.

18. Zhang Shangying (1043–1121), also known as layman Tianjue Wujin. *Xuedou songgu* is the first version of the text that later became the *Emerald Cliff Records* (*Biyanlu*).

19. Daxiong Peak (Dayūhō) is another name for Baizhang, coming from the mountain where he resided.

6. Dialogue between Wujin and Yuanwu about Baizhang

Later [Wujin] told Yuanwu:²⁰

“What I have always regretted is that Xuedou interpreted²¹ the story of Baizhang remaining deaf for three days as ‘pure gold [cast by a] skilled smith should not change its color.’ It demonstrates that he had not fully understood the true Jiangxi tradition.”

Yuanwu: “Recently, I [composed] verses which agree with your view.”

Wujin asked to hear them, and Yuanwu recited his verses:

“Setting the fly-whisk upright or setting it aside
[His] whole activity appears and disappears
Fitting with it, [and yet] giving it away,
Like drawing the character for ‘one’ instead of a discourse.
Directly from the crown of [his] head
Rumbled the sound of crushing thunder
That rooted out [Baizhang’s] fatal disease from his chest.
By receiving the one shout [from Mazu] in the right place
And remaining deaf for three days
The lion’s spiritual power was unleashed.²²
Pure gold refined hundreds of times
Must lose its color.”²³

Wujin, delighted, replied:

“What I have always feared is the progressive decline of the way of the patriarchs. Now that I have seen Guan Yiwu in priestly garb so to speak [I feel relieved].”²⁴

[Sections 7–20 omitted because of space limitations]

20. Yuanwu Keqin (1063–1135), also known as Foguo.

21. The way Xuedou “handles” (*nentei*) this story refers to his understanding of it as a *kōan*.

22. Baizhang is compared to a lion unleashing his power. Saying that Baizhang literally “counterattacked freely” (*hanteki o hoshiimama ni su*) implies that when he endured the one shout from his teacher he seemed submissive, but in this second phase his reaction is likened to the lion huddling up before leaping on his prey.

23. Pure gold is a metaphor for the Buddha nature. The discussion centers here around the expression “changing color,” literally “losing [one’s] color” (*shisshoku*). Xuedou emphasizes the permanent character of gold, whereas Zhang and Yuanwu insist on the necessity to overcome its brilliance.

24. Guan Yiwu (d. 645 B.C.E.), also known as Guan Zhong, was a famous politician in the Spring and Autumn period (722–481 B.C.E.). He is mentioned in the *Analects of Confucius*, a text depicting him as an exceptional man who “restored order in the world.” Paragraphs 7–20 have been omitted.

21. Autobiographical Account

In my case, when I was [staying] at the top of Rengezan in the Ōmi region,²⁵ [the great matter] became clear for the first time. Then, when I arrived at Hakuin's place²⁶ I simply couldn't open my mouth.²⁷ From then on, I contained my euphoric state and immersed myself in practice day and night.

One day, the late master (Hakuin) asked me: "Suddenly one of the most powerful kings of the demons [appears] at your back."²⁸ Extending a single hand he grabs you and wants to throw you into a great flaming pit. At this time, can you find a way to escape?" On the spot I could neither stand up nor leave, and the sweat of shame covered my body. From this moment, whenever I entered his [Sanzen] room the teacher would immediately ask "can you find a way to escape?" I was completely incapable of answering.

If I were like you and easily offered [my initial] thoughts [according to] each action or inner state [I perceived], how could I not have answered? But because I deeply trusted and respected the detailed [accounts] of former [teachers], ultimately I didn't pick a word [at random] to hide my [ignorance]. In this [situation] I was never at peace, whether walking or standing. Heaven and earth [felt] narrow, the sun and the moon [seemed] dark.²⁹ The following year, in the spring of 1744, I asked permission to retire to a secluded building, where day and night I pursued my practice.

22. Hakuin's Encouragement

One day, master [Hakuin] came and told me: "Strong man, when the [old] habits³⁰ appear, don't be afraid of them; simply investigate them until you reach their source. This is why it is said that 'the ancients worried about dying without coming back to life, whereas today's people worry about living without being able to die.' For instance, if you fall into water and promptly hit the bottom, as soon as your feet touch it you will make it back to the surface. [On the other hand] if you fear sinking and indiscriminately wave your legs and arms, then the whole body exhausts itself and you drown. This is called 'abandoning one's grip on the cliff, and coming back to life after having died.' Don't neglect any detail!"

25. Tōrei retired to do a solitary retreat (*dokuzesshin*) at the age of twenty-one (in 1741).

26. Here Tōrei uses the "chamber name," *Sendai kutsu*, to indicate his teacher Hakuin Ekaku. Hakuin's chamber name alludes to the *icchantika*, the class of beings considered by some *sūtras* as incapable of awakening.

27. This is a reference to the *Recorded Sayings of Linji*.

28. These frightening demons are mentioned in the *Sūtra of Perfect Awakening*. Called Kumbhāṇḍa, they come from Indian mythological accounts of evil spirits who were followers of Rūdra. They are also mentioned in the *Lotus Sūtra*.

29. This oppressive description is a paraphrase of the *Emerald Cliff Record*, case 2.

30. The same expression, *kakutsu* with the adjective "old," has been translated earlier as "the old ways."

23. Confirmation from the Texts

After having heard these words, I felt like I had been drinking the finest ghee.³¹ From that moment my meditative investigation was greatly invigorated and I worked twice as hard. Then I spent several days reading the *Diamond Sūtra* and, suddenly obtaining total absorption in [a state of] wisdom (*prajñā-samādhi*), I entered [a state of] forgetting body and mind. To check [the validity of this state] I read the fascicle “Practice and Vows of Samantabhadra” and practically distinguished the different realms of reality (*Dharma-dhātu*) of the Huayan [approach].³² Next, I read the *Lotus Sūtra* and upon reaching the fascicle “Longevity,” I suddenly realized total absorption in the lotus. Looking at the teachings [given by the Buddha] during his entire lifetime, they were as clear as if I looked at the palm of my own hand.

24. Confirmation from the Teacher

I ran to tell master [Hakuin]: “for a long time I have been willing to read the Buddhist Canon without succeeding, but today I have looked at it once and seen it thoroughly.”

Hakuin: “Excellent! You have obtained this kind of joy. But how do you understand a kōan such as ‘Minister Chen Cao [watching from the tea pavilion]?’”³³

I gave him the real [answer].

Hakuin: “You further need to complete it carefully!” He added: “Taking the place of the mandarin, what can you say that would make Chen Cao rejoice?”

I proposed several succinct comments [on the kōan], but none agreed with [his] meaning.

The following day upon entering the [Sanzen] room I was able to pronounce a decisive word.³⁴ Without hesitation the master stood up and tapped me

31. The most refined of the dairy products in India, considered a delicacy (*daigo*). A freer rendering would be “nectar.”

32. The description of four types of interactions between principle and phenomena, culminating in the realm of non-obstruction between phenomena, was developed by the Huayan patriarch Chengguan (737–838).

33. One of the most widely used versions of this kōan is included in the *Emerald Cliff Record*, case 33.

34. Decisive word (*tengo*) is a free translation for an expression meaning “turning word” and indicating one’s spiritual understanding. It comes from the third verse in Chinese quatrains, which introduces a “shift” or change of perspective.

twice on the back, saying “you have managed to say it, and for the first time you are in agreement with my intention; but even so, never indulge in thinking it is easy: in the future you will know for yourself.”

25. Further Polishing

The following day, when I entered again the [Sanzen] room the master asked: “How do you understand the kōan of Shushan’s memorial?”³⁵

I replied: “With a poisonous hand he wanted to cut off the root of people’s lives.”³⁶

Hakuin: “And how does it really feel once the root of life has been cut off?”

I replied: “Shushan and the building workers together extend a single helping hand.”

Hakuin: “You have not yet reached the bottom [of this case]!”

26. Zhaozhou and the Old Woman

At that time, I also quoted the case of Zhaozhou seeing through the old woman;³⁷ I said that if I were there at that moment I would have turned to Zhaozhou and asked: “Did you see through the old woman before she spoke or after?”

Hakuin said, answering for Zhaozhou, “Straight ahead!”

He added: “In this way the old woman of Mount Tai has been exposed by the master!”

Hakuin abruptly asked me: “Where do you look to encounter the old woman?”³⁸

I hesitated.

The master took on a terrifying expression and, raising his voice, said: “That’s not right, not right!”

35. This kōan is related to a memorial erected for Shushan Kuangren (also Guangren, 837–909) while he was still alive. The full story is found in Kirchner 2004: 69–70.

36. The poisonous hand is a metaphor for apparently brutal or ruthless means used to guide a student.

37. See Kirchner 2004: 9.

38. This “encounter” (*shōken*) does not indicate a casual meeting, but the formal encounter of a disciple and teacher.

27. Cornered by Hakuin

The following day, when I entered the [Sanzen] room the master saw me coming and suddenly extended his arm asking: “How is my hand like the Buddha’s hand?”³⁹

In response to this concise question I provided a decisive word, which the master greatly praised.

Then I said: “A while ago when you questioned me on the case of the Old Woman Burning the Hermitage,⁴⁰ I failed [to recognize] the prodigious skill of the old woman. Given the type of question put by the old woman, nothing could have prevented the monk from losing his mind and spirit in surprise and the whole world from being dumbfounded. I have a decisive word, and in place of the hermit I would have held the girl firmly saying, ‘For twenty years I have been supported by the old woman . . .’”

Before I could end my sentence, the master gathered all his energy which came out as a single shout.

The sound pierced me to the marrow; for several days I felt pain in my chest, my body and mind were entranced as if I were in the midst of clouds and fog.

I thought to myself: “I am already clearly awakened. For what reason is it like this? Definitely, one must admit that although having the eye of Kenshō, the power of meditative absorption⁴¹ has not yet matured.” Thus, I made the vow to [fully] realize meditative absorption. Days and months passed, but still I was not free.

28. Retreat

Then, I made a retreat in the area east of the Kamo River; closing all doors, I shut myself from all contacts, and strictly practiced from morning to evening. I was like a convict sentenced to death waiting for the execution and counting the remaining days on his fingers. Freely handling the bright pearl,⁴² I wouldn’t let go for even a second. Sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing, the uninterrupted succession of right mindfulness was difficult [to attain]. My chest choked with lament and fear, whether sitting or standing I was never at peace. This lasted for fifty days, when all of a sudden [everything] collapsed and the bright pearl was smashed to pieces. Having become totally exposed, completely bare, I truly understood [the meaning of] the pure breeze [following] the release of one’s burden.

39. This is one of the Three Barriers of Huanglong. See Kirchner 2004: 8.

40. See Kirchner 2004: 84.

41. Literally, “the power of *samādhi*” (*zenjō no chikara*).

42. Concerning the related verse, “The black dragon coughs up its bright pearl,” Hori comments: “A fabulous gem kept underneath the chin of the sleeping black dragon. To attempt to steal the pearl is a metaphor for risking one’s life. See, for example, the story in *Chuang-tzu*, ch. 32.” (Hori 2003 641.)

29. Whipping again the Dead Ox

Nevertheless, not yet having entirely mastered the sphere of activity, I again whipped the dead ox and at the same time pushed him forward. Gritting my teeth and clenching my fists I didn't care whether I had a physical body; during freezing days and cold nights sweat constantly soaked my robe. When the demon of sleep gained force I would wake myself with a needle's point. [These austerities] entered my bones and penetrated my marrow; I had lost taste for food and drink.

Another fifty days elapsed, during which eight or nine times I had [flashes of] insight. Finally, one day I thoroughly realized the integration of activity that the late master [had indicated].⁴³ Ha ha ha! So far I had mistakenly been doing a lifeless type of meditative investigation! Like Boyun, I deserved thirty blows from the stick. I truly understood I had received a gift from the late master that was huge and powerful. If it were not for all his help and teaching, I wouldn't be here today! For my whole life I would have mistakenly remained attached to my limited awakening and convictions.

Now when I reflect on these past events, [I see that] blood was dripping from each and every word or sentence: it is both frightening and saddening. From that time onwards, one moment of mindfulness after another [has kept flowing] through my mind without interval; days and nights I have been practicing and have never stopped since. How could one think that this is easy and waste precious time in idleness?

30. Sickness and Relapse

I want to make every effort to realize this approach and, in accordance with my ability, to restore the authentic teaching that has fallen [into oblivion]. Comrades, no doubt in your hearts you share this [same objective]! At this point, I ask you to summon all your discerning insight.

Because of my many diseases I know well the diseases of others. Due to the method I used to cure my own diseases I am well versed in remedies. But because my own diseases have finally been cured, I am all the more distressed by the diseases of others; and because others are sick my own disease returns.⁴⁴

Master Luopu said: "Only with the last word one reaches the outer gate of the prison."⁴⁵ These words are so true! To break loose from life and death, and to grasp the authentic stamp [of realization], everything depends on this

43. When Tōrei did this retreat Hakuin was still alive, but by the time he wrote the revised version of this publication Hakuin had passed away. Hakuin died in 1769.

44. Allusion to the story of Vimalakīrti, where the lay bodhisattva pretends to be sick to better teach the truth. The implication is that the real sickness is lack of realization of Buddhahood.

45. The same quotation also appears at the beginning of this chapter.

precise moment. Only to those who have stepped over the bars above the barriers of going beyond will [this] be entirely familiar.

I am also of the same [opinion] and my sheer hope is that one such person, [even living] three thousand miles away, will come and deliver me from this disease. Should it not be the case, I shall let all the people under heaven denigrate me as they wish.

[End of the] first fascicle of the Treatise on the Inexhaustible Lamp of Zen.

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