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# ZEN KOANS



*The largest collection in  
English with new commentary  
by The Venerable*

**Gyomay M. Kubose**

*and original sumie illustrations*

by **Ryozo Ogura**

# ZEN KOANS

**Venerable Gyomay M. Kubose**

Two monks were arguing about a flag. One said, "The flag is moving." The other said, "The wind is moving." A Zen Master passing by remarked, "Not the wind, not the flag; mind is moving."

*The Zen koan is, essentially, a problem that can not be solved by the intellect. In trying to understand the koan, the student learns the limitations of thought—and frequently experiences "satori," a direct, non-verbal awareness of reality. Used by Zen Masters from ancient times to the present, koans are famous guideposts in the quest for enlightenment—Nirvana.*

*This unique collection contains over 200 classical and modern koans. It is, in fact, the most complete compilation yet available in a one-volume English edition.*

*To render the koans more intelligible to contemporary readers, the Venerable Kubose, an American-born Buddhist priest, has provided original commentary for each. Thus the Western reader can relate the koans to modern life while gaining some understanding of Zen.*

**GYOMAY M. KUBOSE** *is the founder of the Buddhist Temple of Chicago. Born in San Francisco, he completed his early education in Japan and returned to the United States to take a philosophy degree at the University of California. He became a disciple of the late Haya Akegarasu, a controversial thinker who revolutionized Shin Buddhism. The Venerable Kubose returned to Japan from 1966 to 1970, pursuing advanced studies at Otani University in Kyoto. Upon his return, he founded the Buddhist Educational Center in Chicago, organized to further the study of Buddhist philosophy, art, and culture in the United States. He was a close friend of the late Zen Master Nyogen Senzaki and exchanged visits with the renowned Dr. D. T. Suzuki.*

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Siddhartha Herman Hesse

**ZEN  
KOANS**



Bodhidharma

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**Venerable Gyomay M. Kubose**

*original sumie illustrations*

*by* **Ryozo Ogura**

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*A special transmission outside the scriptures,  
No dependence on words or letters,  
Direct pointing to the soul of man,  
Seeing into one's nature and the attainment  
of Buddhahood.*

# Contents

	<i>Author's Note</i>	<i>ix</i>	
	<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xi</i>	
I	Transcending Duality	1	
II	Awareness	29	
III	Non-attachment	65	
IV	Naturalness	127	
V	What Is Zen?	149	
VI	No Imitations	211	
VII	Beyond Reason	223	
VIII	A Matter of Life and Death	253	
	<i>Zen Transmission Lineage</i>	260	
	<i>Glossary of Buddhist Names and Terms</i>	263	
	<i>Index of Koans</i>	271	



## Author's Note

The purpose of this book is to provide the Western reader with the most complete collection of Zen koans yet available in a one-volume English edition and to render the koans more intelligible through new commentary prepared especially to meet the needs of contemporary readers and students.

Most koans were originally written in ancient Chinese, a language dissimilar in structure to Indo-European languages. To compound the communication problem, ancient and modern Chinese differ more radically than do old and modern English. The koans eventually were translated from Chinese into Japanese by Zen scholar-monks, and new koans were created by Japanese Zen Masters. But of the 1,700 known koans, only a fraction have been translated into English. These translations either are scholarly or are aimed at the full-time student of Zen. The one or two popular volumes for the general audience are scant collections, difficult to understand since they make liberal use of names, terms, and customs unfamiliar to Western culture.

Along with the koans, a huge body of commentary has appeared over the centuries. Ancient and modern Masters have commented on the koans and have commented on the comments. The commentators frequently dispute the koan itself or another's commentary. But this matters little since any one koan can have a hundred different comments, none of them "wrong."

Commentaries differ according to the culture and time in which they were written and also according to the disposition and personality of the commentator. Commentary written by Japanese Zen Masters Genro and Fugai in the eighteenth century seems more dynamic than the commentary of thirteenth century Chinese Masters. It is only natural, then, that commentary written in the twentieth century

will differ from ancient Chinese and Japanese observations. The commentary in this volume is completely new and, like the book itself, intended to make the koan's *question* clear—not to provide an “answer” in the sense of a solution.

The arrangement of koans into categories is a departure from the format of ancient books and is done for the sake of easier reading and comprehension. However it should be kept in mind that there are no real “categories” of koans. All koans are in the same category: finding the true self.

In addition to many books in the Japanese language, the following books in English were consulted and have been invaluable references: *The Hekigan Roku* (“*The Blue Cliff Records*”) by R. D. M. Shaw and *The Iron Flute*, edited by Ruth Strout McCandless with translations and commentaries by the late Nyogen Senzaki, a close and honored friend.

Throughout this book, Japanese names have been used (with a few exceptions) rather than Chinese because Westerners are more familiar with Romanized Japanese than with Romanized Chinese. For example: Tendo (Japanese) is T'ien-t'ung (Chinese); Sozan (Japanese) is Ts'ao-shan (Chinese). Other exceptions are ancient Indian names and titles such as Buddha, Gautama, Bodhisattva, Manjusri, and a few others that are familiar through general usage.

Finally, I am very grateful to Nancy DeRoin, who edited and arranged the manuscript and encouraged me to finish the work.

GYOMAY M. KUBOSE  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

# Introduction

Koans are stories, or questions, given to students and monks by their Masters to discipline them and to test their understanding of Zen. Zenists also use the koans to challenge each other and to test each other's—as well as their own—ability. In ancient days it was the custom for monks to visit different Zen Buddhist monasteries and temples with the purpose of challenging the residing Master. This was sincere and rigorous practice.

The koan literally means “public record.” *Ko* means public; *an* means record. Just as the reports, or case records, in law courts are used as precedents in order to exercise and interpret the law, the koan is utilized to express the universality, or absoluteness, of Zen. The koan is not private or mystic in any sense. It is through the koan that the essence of Zen, the essence of life, is communicated. This is somewhat like love, which is experienced privately but, at the same time, has universality—anyone can experience it. Though universal, love is communicated directly from one person to another, just as Zen is transmitted from mind to mind.

In order to communicate love, words are often insufficient. Since love is life, it is immediate and direct, and the method of communication is very dynamic. Love may even be communicated by hitting, scolding, and other contrary expressions. Sometimes to express deep concern and love we say, “I don't love you.” Love gives and love takes away. Love does not have just one, static form.

So in Zen, the truth of reality, the essence of life is communicated dynamically. There are koans, “Khats” (deep sudden cries), and blows, all aimed at awakening the student. Negative methods are often more effective than

the ordinary affirmative ways of teaching. There is no room for sentimentality because Zen deals with the essence of life and the truth of the universe.

The koan is never solved by reason or by the intellect. Koans are solved only through living experience or by intuitive understanding. Today, many people intellectualize and conceptualize life and so become victims of concepts and intellect. Concepts create trouble in life because conceptualizations become confused with *real* things. Life is living, clear and simple. (Why can't we become more simple and direct?) The koans point out the simplicity and directness of life and truth; therefore, reasoning and intellectual judgment are totally useless to solve koans.

Of course, to understand and appreciate koans fully, one should have some background in Chinese and Japanese culture and in Buddhism—the more one has, the easier the task will be. I consider this volume introductory. If one wishes to study further, there are excellent English translations of *The Hekigan Roku*, with commentary by Setcho and Engo, and the *Mumonkan*, with commentary by Mumon.

If one wants to enjoy, appreciate, and live life fully, one *must* be aware of the truth of life. Ancient Chinese and Japanese Zen people had such an awareness, as is reflected in their approach to nature and human life. Man is, after all, only a small part of nature. Those ancient Zenists always harmonized and became one with nature. They never thought in terms of “conquering” nature. To see Chinese pictures and read Chinese poems is to discover that man always disappears into nature. Indeed, nature is frequently more compatible with man's well-being than is human society—particularly when it is dominated by politicians and profiteers.

To illustrate this, there is a story about a Chinese Zen monk who lived in a tree. The governor of the district,

named Hakurakuten, heard of this famous Zen monk and visited him one day. Seeing the monk perched high up in the tree, the governor said, "Living on the tree is quite dangerous; you might fall at any moment. Why don't you live on the ground?" The monk replied, "Is it safe down there on the earth?" We can see the dangers of earthly life today more clearly than ever before.

Many koans are difficult to understand because they treat the absolute, the essence of life, in such a simple yet symbolic way. The koan deals with a dimension deeper than the world of the five senses. All of our knowledge is based on sensation, perception, conception, ideas, conscious thought, and the psychological subconscious mind. We are firmly attached to these areas of knowledge and tend to feel there is nothing outside them. But Zen deals with wisdom that transcends ordinary knowledge. And when one comes to understand the Zen realm of non-attachment, the factual world is seen in an entirely different light. All the troubles of life, without exception, are the result of attachment. Instead of clinging—or attaching—to things and conditions, one should understand the true, changing nature of the world and live freely within it.

One can become the master of life and of one's world instead of a slave to both. That is the intention of Zen, and the koan, in trying to demonstrate the reality of life, is Zen's most useful tool. After all, the purpose of studying a koan is not simply to understand it and be finished with it, but to live the koan, solving it each day.

# **I Transcending Duality**

Contemporary Western culture is dualistic; everything is dichotomized into good or bad, right or wrong, friend or enemy, this or that. To dichotomize is to divide, and competition usually follows. It necessitates making constant judgments (this is right; that is wrong) that create trouble in society as well as in individual life. If one wishes a life of peace and harmony, duality must be transcended and the world of oneness attained. Oneness does not mean sameness. Each one is unique and absolute. Each one has its own beauty and value and should not be compared. Peace and freedom exist only in the world of oneness, the absolute world. Zen stresses the transcending of duality in the following koans.

**Every Day Is a Good Day**

Unmon said: "I do not ask you about fifteen days ago. But what about fifteen days hence? Come, say a word about this!" Since none of the monks answered, he answered for them: "Every day is a good day."

*"Every day is a good day" is a simple statement, but very few know its real meaning. The "good day" does not refer to a nice day as compared to a bad day. It means the absolute, not the relative, day. Today is the absolute day, the only day in the eternity of time. Today is never repeated. Every day is fresh and new just as one's life is new each day. Every day is a good day, but the good is not of one's own making. It is good in the original, or absolute, sense—rain or shine, war or peace, sickness or health. The past is only reference; the future is only hope. Today is real.*

## No Cold and Heat

A monk asked Tozan, "How can we escape the cold and heat?" Tozan replied, "Why not go where there is no cold and heat?" "Is there such a place?" the monk asked. Tozan commented, "When cold, be thoroughly cold; when hot, be hot through and through."

*Heat and cold cause discomfort; they represent troubles in life. When troubles arise, what should one do? If one can escape, fine. But many of life's problems cannot be escaped. Where is the place of no trouble? Zen says: Become one with trouble. When the day is hot, don't cry, "Oh, hot! Oh, hot! What shall I do?" Take the heat and be it instead of complaining about or trying to escape it. Whatever it is, if we become totally one with it, we become the master instead of the victim.*



## The Short Staff

Shuzan held out his short staff and said, "If you call this a short staff, you oppose its reality. If you do not call it a short staff, you ignore the fact. Now what do you wish to call this?"

*If the student calls it a short staff, he attaches to its name; if he doesn't call it a short staff, he ignores its reality. He can neither assert nor deny. Only when he falls to the very bottom of contradiction and utter confusion will he enlighten himself. "What is this?" Shuzan demands. It just is. Don't talk about it; experience it.*

## Joshu's Mu

Joshu (A.D. 778-897) was a famous Chinese Zen Master who lived in Joshu, the province from which he took his name. One day a troubled monk approached him, intending to ask the Master for guidance. A dog walked by. The monk asked Joshu, "Has that dog a Buddha-nature or not?" The monk had barely completed his question when Joshu shouted: "MU!"

*Of all koans, Joshu's Mu is the most famous. It is extremely popular with Zen Masters, who frequently assign it to novices. If the student tends properly to business, Mu comes to resemble a hot iron ball stuck in his throat—he can neither swallow it nor spit it out. The importance of Joshu's Mu is its succinct (one syllable) revelation of Buddhism.*

*Mu is the negative symbol in Chinese meaning "not" or "no-thing." Mu is also a basic concept in Oriental philosophy. There is a relative Mu and an Absolute Mu. The relative Mu, in Chinese characters, is the opposite of U which means "is." The Absolute Mu of Zen Buddhism transcends "is" and "is not." In order to "understand" this koan, it is necessary to be aware of this distinction.*

*When the monk asked Joshu, "Has that dog a Buddha-nature or not?" he was asking not only from the standpoint of his own troubled mind, but from the basic Buddhist teaching that "all beings have Buddha-nature." Joshu realized this.*



*His "MU!" was a blow aimed at breaking, or untying, the monk's attachment to that teaching.*

*The essence of Buddha's teaching is non-attachment. All human troubles and sufferings, without exception, are due to attachment. Even attachment to the idea of non-attachment is attachment! Joshu wanted the monk to transcend the relative world, transcend the teachings, transcend U and Mu, transcend Buddhism, and gain the free and independent world of enlightenment. Satori, or enlightenment, is*

*this new dimension or perspective in life.*

*Ordinary human life is always attached to the relative: the "is" and the "is not," good and bad, right and wrong. But life itself is constantly changing; the condition of society changes; right and wrong changes; every situation is different according to time and place. Static concepts are not appropriate to life.*

*Thus, Mu is crucial: it offers no surface upon which the intellect can fasten. The word Mu must be experienced as the world of "MU!"*

## Seijo's Two Souls

Chokan had a very beautiful daughter named Seijo. He also had a handsome young cousin named Ochu. Joking, he would often comment that they would make a fine married couple. Actually, he planned to give his daughter in marriage to another man. But young Seijo and Ochu took him seriously; they fell in love and thought themselves engaged. One day Chokan announced Seijo's betrothal to the other man. In rage and despair, Ochu left by boat. After several days journey, much to his astonishment and joy he discovered that Seijo was on the boat with him!

They went to a nearby city where they lived for several years and had two children. But Seijo could not forget her father; so Ochu decided to go back with her and ask the father's forgiveness and blessing. When they arrived, he left Seijo on the boat and went to the father's house. He humbly apologized to the father for taking his daughter away and asked forgiveness for them both.

"What is the meaning of all this madness?" the father exclaimed. Then he related that after Ochu had left, many

years ago, his daughter Seijo had fallen ill and had lain comatose in bed since. Ochu assured him that he was mistaken, and, in proof, he brought Seijo from the boat. When she entered, the Seijo lying ill in bed rose to meet her, and the two became one.

Zen Master Goso, referring to the legend, observed, "Seijo had two souls, one always sick at home and the other in the city, a married woman with two children. Which was the true soul?"

*When one attains enlightenment, one transcends duality and is able to understand the truth of all things. The truth cannot be divided or dichotomized. Illusion and reality are only relative. There is no so-called reality without illusion. The new exists only in relation to the old. As for east and west, there are no such things. "To be" or "not to be" is not much of a problem. Life and death are different phases of one thing. Enjoy spring; enjoy summer. Enjoy, also, fall and winter! Truth is one; truth is many.*

**Bells and Robes**

Zen Master Unmon said: "The world is vast and wide. Why do you put on your robes at the sound of a bell?"

*In a Zen temple the lives of the monks are well regulated. When the bell sounds, each puts on his robe and goes to the meditation hall. But Unmon asks: Why? There is an old saying that whatever comes in through the gates is foreign. The gates are the senses: sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. If we decide, move, and act by the senses, we obey foreign commands. In response to our environment we feel pressures, are easily upset, become nervous. This is one of the characteristics of modern life. But if one settles down firmly in one's inner life, all actions, feelings, and deeds come from deep within. The unenlightened one does things because he must do them; the enlightened one acts because he wants to. Freedom lies in the center of life. Unmon points to the center.*

## Ganto's Two Meals

Kisan paid a visit to Ganto, who was living in quiet seclusion, and asked, "Brother, are you getting two meals regularly?" "The fourth son of the Cho family supports me, and I am very much obliged to him," said Ganto. "If you do not do your part well, you will be born as an ox in the next life and will have to repay him what you owed him in this life," Kisan cautioned.

Ganto put his fists on his forehead but said nothing. "If you mean horns," Kisan said, "you must stick out your fingers on top of your head." But before he finished speaking, Ganto shouted, "Hey!" Kisan did not understand his meaning and said, "If you know something deeper, why don't you explain it to me?" Ganto hissed at him and said, "You have been studying Buddhism for thirty years, as I have, and you are still wandering around. I have nothing to do with you. Just get out." And with these words he shut the door in Kisan's face.

The fourth son of the Cho family happened to be passing by and, out of pity, took Kisan to his home.

"Thirty years ago we were close friends," Kisan said sorrowfully, "but now he has attained something higher than I have and will not impart it to me."

That night Kisan could not sleep. He got up and went to Ganto's house. "Brother," he implored, "please be kind and preach the Dharma for me." Ganto opened the door and disclosed the teaching. The next morning Kisan returned home, happy with attainment.

*When Kisan asked Ganto about "two meals regularly" he meant "are you leading a true monk's life?" (Two meals a day, breakfast and lunch, was customary for monks.) Ganto replied that he was greatly obliged to the Cho family. There was no way to return their kindness except by being a good monk. To be a monk, in itself, was a way of returning the favor. Kisan cautioned him against accepting too much kindness; Ganto might, as superstition went, be reborn as Cho's servant, maybe an ox. Ganto put his fists on his forehead:*

*“If you look at life as fifty-fifty, give and take, then I owe them more than service; however, I am already an ox!” But Kisan didn’t understand this view of life. So he pursued his dualistic viewpoint: “If you mean to show horns, then you must do it like this” (sticking out fingers).*

*Ganto, by this time, was thoroughly disgusted with Kisan’s shortsightedness: “You have been studying Buddhism for thirty years, and you are still attaching to forms. Just get out!” True friendship is sincere, direct, and open, with no compromise. Ganto was kind. A cup must be emptied before it can be filled. One must be brought to a dead-end before the Way opens up. And one must die before one is born a new person. Late that night, Kisan was ready to experience truth, which can not be explained.*

## Bodhidharma and the Emperor Wu

Emperor Wu of China was a very benevolent Buddhist. He built many temples and monasteries, educated many monks, and performed countless philanthropic deeds in the name of Buddhism. He asked the great teacher Bodhidharma, "What merit is there in my good works?" Bodhidharma replied, "None whatsoever." The Emperor then asked, "What is the Primal meaning of Holy Reality?" Bodhidharma answered, "Emptiness, not holiness." The Emperor then queried, "Who, then, is this confronting me?" "I do not know," was Bodhidharma's reply. Since the Emperor did not understand, Bodhidharma left his kingdom.

Later, the Emperor related this conversation to an adviser, Prince Shiko. Shiko reprimanded him, saying that Bodhidharma was a great teacher possessed of the highest truth. The Emperor, filled with regret, dispatched a messenger to entreat Bodhidharma to return. But Shiko warned, "Even if all the people in the land went, that one will never return."

*When Bodhidharma, an Indian, went to China about the year A.D. 520, Buddhism was well established. Emperor Wu invited Bodhidharma to his court. Bodhidharma's answer to his questions came as something of a shock. But the Emperor's attitude was dualistic and totally off the track. The Buddhist way of life is to enlighten one's self and find one's own true life. The Emperor's questions (what do I get since I did so much? what is reality? what are you?) were all about something not himself. So Bodhidharma left the Emperor and went to a mountain temple where he meditated, without speaking, for nine years. He became the father of Zen.*



## Returning to the Ordinary World

*In the Zen life there are no "ifs" or "buts." The Zen life is always fully lived here and now. Many people live in the "if" world, speculating rather than doing. "If it does not work out"; "if I get hurt"; "if I die." "If" people always excuse themselves in the "but" world: "I wanted to do it, but"; "I want to see you, but"; there are always excuses. The monk in this koan asks how an individual, once enlightened, relates to the ordinary world. Thus, he goes beyond his own experience and imagines the world of "ifs." Rather, he should work hard and enlighten himself; then he will know the answer. Kegon's reply will be misunderstood if one does not grasp that a Buddha, an enlightened one, lives this worldly life together with worldly people. For a Bodhisattva, everyday life is the enlightened life; the ordinary world is Nirvana. The broken mirror and fallen flowers have their places.*

A monk asked Kegon, "How does an enlightened one return to the ordinary world?" Kegon replied, "A broken mirror never reflects again; fallen flowers never go back to the old branches."

## No Beard

Wakuan complained when he saw a picture of bearded Bodhidharma, "Why hasn't that fellow a beard?"

*Bodhidharma, the Hindu who brought Zen to China from India in the sixth century, is always depicted with a heavy beard. When we say "Bodhidharma" we immediately conceptualize him. If we say "Buddha," we conceptualize the Buddha. If we say "Christ," we conceptualize Christ. We make ourselves victims of concepts. By refuting appearance, Wakuan invites us to go beyond the duality of beard and no-beard and see the real Bodhidharma.*



## Everything is Best

One day Banzan was walking through a market. He overheard a customer say to the butcher, "Give me the best piece of meat you have." "Everything in my shop is the best," replied the butcher. "You can not find any piece of meat that is not the best." At these words, Banzan was enlightened.

*This koan illustrates the core of Zen teachings. Zen speaks of absolute value, not relative values. The rose is best as a rose. The lily is best as a lily. Each individual is the best in the whole world. The only obligation one has in life is to bring out one's best.*

**Manjusri Enters the Gate**

One day as Manjusri stood outside the gate, the Buddha called to him, "Manjusri, Manjusri, why do you not enter?" Manjusri replied, "I do not see myself outside. Why enter?"

*The important question in this koan is "what is the gate?" Normally a gate is something through which one enters or exits. It divides the inside from the outside. But in the world of Dharma, or Truth, there is no inside or outside; the truth is immanent and universal. When the Buddha asked Manjusri (symbol of wisdom) to enter the gate, he was testing Manjusri's understanding. Manjusri replied, in effect, that there is no gate in the world of Truth. Truth is everywhere; he was not outside it. But still, humankind feels that there is a gate. But it is a gateless gate and hard to enter, even though it stands wide open all the time! The gateless gates are numerous—as many as there are people. Each must enter through his own gate.*

## Where to Meet after Death

Dogo paid a visit to his sick fellow monk, Ungan. "Where can I see you again if you die and leave only your corpse?" Dogo asked. "I will meet you where nothing is born and nothing dies," Ungan replied. Dogo criticized his response saying, "What you should have said is that there is no place where nothing is born and nothing dies and that we need not see each other at all."

*Some people eat together, sleep together, but never really meet. Did Dogo and Ungan really meet? There are many living corpses moving around. The true meeting in life is the meeting of life. Unless one has true understanding, one hears without really hearing, sees without really seeing. If Dogo and Ungan were really enlightened, such sophisticated mondos (questions-and-answers) would be unnecessary. Just clasping each other's hand would be more than enough. Genro wrote a poem on this koan:*

*The old plum tree is in full bloom;  
The southern branch owns the whole spring—  
So does the northern branch.*

**A Philosopher Asks Buddha**

A philosopher asked Buddha: "Without words, without silence, will you tell me the truth?" The Buddha sat quietly. The philosopher then bowed and thanked the Buddha, saying, "With your loving kindness I have cleared away my delusions and entered the true path." After the philosopher had gone, Ananda asked Buddha what the philosopher had attained. The Buddha commented, "A good horse runs even at the shadow of the whip."

*Buddha's silence was dynamic. The philosopher was quick to understand and thanked him. But Ananda did not understand. Truth is beyond words. Life is only understood by life.*

## Jizo's Buddhism

One day, Jizo received one of Hofuku's disciples and asked him, "How does your teacher instruct you?" "My teacher instructs me to shut my eyes and see no evil thing; to cover my ears and hear no evil sound; to stop my mind-activities and form no wrong ideas," the monk replied. "I do not ask you to shut your eyes," Jizo said, "but you do not see a thing. I do not ask you to cover your ears, but you do not hear a sound. I do not ask you to cease your mind-activities, but you do not form any idea at all."

*The purpose of teaching in Buddhism is to enable and assist the student to find the real meaning of life—so life will be peaceful, serene, joyful, and abundantly creative. A true teacher always individualizes his lessons according to the student who receives them. The pupil in the koan was a novice, still firmly attached to what he saw, heard, and thought. So his first teacher gave him a basic lesson: avoid attaching importance to sight, sound, and thought. Jizo's teaching went even deeper: one must open the Third Eye. Reality has no color, no form. See things as they are and you will not attach. Life lives and moves on.*



## The Southern Mountain

Sekiso lived and taught on the Southern Mountain, and Kankei lived and taught on the Northern Mountain. One day, a monk came from the Northern Monastery to the Southern Monastery in search of teaching. Sekiso said to him, "My Southern Monastery is no better than the Monastery in the North." The monk did not know what reply to make. When he returned to Kankei and told him the story, Kankei said, "You should have told him that I am ready to enter Nirvana any day."

*As the saying goes, the neighbor's grass is always greener. So one who lives in the world of comparison will always seek a greener pasture, as did this monk. Sekiso pointed this out to the monk by assuring him that the monastery he had just left was every bit as good a place to learn. Unnerved by this noncompetitive attitude, the monk didn't know how to reply. But his former teacher responded to the compliment by saying, "I am ready to die any day." Both teachers were trying hard to show the monk that truth is nowhere if not within.*

## The Girl Comes Out of Meditation

Once upon a time, Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, went to an assemblage of Buddhas. By the time he arrived, all had departed except for the Buddha Sakyamuni and one girl. She was seated in a place of highest honor, deep in meditation. Manjusri asked the Buddha how it was possible for a mere girl to attain a depth of meditation that even he could not attain. The Buddha said, "Bring her out of meditation and ask her yourself."

So Manjusri walked around the girl three times [a gesture of reverence], then snapped his fingers. She remained deep in meditation. He then tried rousing her by invoking all his magic powers; he even transported her to a high heaven. All was to no avail, so deep was her concentration. But suddenly, up from below the earth sprang Momyo, an unenlightened one. He snapped his fingers once, and the girl came out of her meditation.

*The principals of this koan are symbolic. Manjusri personifies wisdom; Momyo its opposite. How is it that a mere girl could attain a state that Manjusri couldn't? Why was the wise Manjusri unable even to rouse her to learn the answer to that question? The purpose of meditation is to overcome duality, to become selfless-ness. Selfless-ness can be likened to a bottle filled to capacity; when the cork is put in, no matter how you shake it, toss it, drop it, there is no noise. But if the bottle is only half full, it makes the sound of water. Of course, if the bottle is empty, there is no sound, but there is no water, either. Merely "sitting quietly" in meditation is like a bottle without any water. True meditation is like the bottle filled to the top. The girl in the koan was selfless-ness. Even Manjusri couldn't rouse her. Then how could Momyo, an ignoramus, rouse the girl? Even the wise man, if he becomes attached to wisdom, becomes the victim of wisdom. Even good deeds, if we become attached to them, become bad. Non-attachment is the Way.*

## The Real Way Is Not Difficult

Joshu addressed an assembly of monks: "The Real Way is not difficult, but it dislikes the Relative. If there is but little speech, it is about the Relative or it is about the Absolute. This old monk is not within the Absolute. Do you value that or not?" A monk said to him, "If you are not within the Absolute, how can you judge its value?" Joshu said, "Neither do I know that." The monk argued, "Your Reverence, if you do not yet know, how is it that you say you are not within the Absolute?" Joshu said, "Your questioning is effective. Finish your worship and leave."

*Everyone has Buddha-nature—pure, original, and true. Everyone has intrinsic value and beauty. Rose, lily, tree, or stone, each should be as it is. If you are short, be short. If you are tall, be tall. Nothing is wrong. "The Real Way is not difficult, but it dislikes the Relative." If one compares, relatively, then good and bad, beautiful and ugly, tall and short, right and wrong arise, creating difficulty. Even a little talk about relative or absolute and, like the monk, one is not within the Absolute. The Real Way is not difficult because it is the only Way. It is the Absolute Way. Pretensions are difficult because one has to make them up. The True Way is not difficult because it is.*

## The Turtle in the Garden

A monk saw a turtle in the garden of Daizui's monastery and asked the teacher, "All beings cover their bones with flesh and skin. Why does this being cover its flesh and skin with bones?" Master Daizui took off one of his sandals and covered the turtle with it.

*The monk was bent on discriminating—skin, flesh, bones, inside, outside. Discrimination can be carried as far as one likes—is mind inside of body or is body inside of mind?—but this attitude always results in arguments and explanations. Life is neither. Life is an organic, living totality. Daizui covered the turtle with his sandal to indicate to the monk that his understanding of reality reached no further than the phenomenal world.*

## The Temple

*The temple here represents the reality of the world. The back of the temple is the world of phenomena and appearances, and the front represents the essence and the reality of the Dharma. When one passes behind the temple, one sees Smith, Jones, mountains, rivers. But when one goes in front, one sees nothing in particular. The monk protests that there is no profit in not seeing. Many modern people also say, "I believe only what I see." Hofuku scolds the monk for seeing only appearances and not the essence, the reality. The temple is always the temple, as it is, and nothing else. In Buddhism there is no gain or loss.*

One day Hofuku said to his disciples, "When one passes behind the temple, he meets Chang and Li, but he does not see anyone in front of it. Why is this? Which of the two roads is better?" A monk answered, "Something must be wrong with the sight. Nothing is gained without seeing." The Master scolded the monk, saying, "Stupid, the temple is always like this." The monk said, "If it were not the temple, one should see something." The Master said, "I am talking about the temple and nothing else."

## Lotus Blossoms and Leaves

A monk asked Chimon, "Before the lotus blossom has emerged from the water, what is it?" Chimon said, "A lotus blossom." The monk pursued, "After it has come out of the water, what is it?" Chimon replied, "Lotus leaves."

*Chimon belonged to the Unmon school of Zen, which is harder for laymen to understand than other Zen schools. The monk who asked this question was well advanced in Zen. His question concerns the relationship of the absolute and its manifestations, the relationship of reality and phenomena. The koan could be variously rephrased as: "Who am I before I am born?" "Before the world appeared, what was it?" "Before the universe came to be, what was it?" Chimon's answers run counter to what we actually see. But from the point of view of the absolute, the lotus blossom under water is still a lotus blossom. After it has emerged into view, it may as well be called lotus leaves because it has leaves as well. It does not matter what name it goes by in the phenomenal world. Whether water, ice, or steam, the essence is the same. White man, black man, brown man are all "man" from the point of view of humanity. If one attaches to the particulars of the phenomenal world, universality will be overlooked.*



## **II**

# **Awareness**

Unless we are aware, we do not fully live. We have ears, but we do not hear; we have eyes, but we do not see. Oftentimes we are merely existing. Awareness means awareness of life. The Japanese haiku poem, an extremely short form that has been used for over three hundred years, grew out of awareness. The haiku is a direct expression of life:

Maple leaves  
Falling down—  
Showing front,  
Showing back.

—Ryokan



## The Gate of Paradise

Nobushige, a soldier, came to Hakuin, a famous Zen Master, and asked, "Is there really a paradise and a hell?" "Who are you?" inquired Hakuin. "I am a samurai," Nobushige replied. "You, a samurai!" exclaimed Hakuin. "What kind of a lord would have you as his guard? You look like a beggar!" Nobushige became so enraged that he began to draw his sword. Hakuin continued, "So you have a sword. It is probably too dull to even cut off my head." Nobushige brandished his weapon. Hakuin remarked, "Here, open the gates of hell." At these words the perceptive samurai sheathed his sword and bowed. "Here, open the gates of paradise," said Hakuin.

*Heaven and hell are the contents of our everyday life.*

## Zuigan Calls His Own Master

Zuigan called out to himself every day, "Master." Then he answered himself, "Yes, sir." And after that he added, "Become sober." Again he answered, "Yes, sir." And after that he continued, "Do not be deceived by others." "Yes, sir; yes, sir," he answered.

*Calling the Master within is not mere introspection, the usual aim of which is to understand one's psychological motives or evaluate one's behavior—good or bad. Zuigan's calling, "Master," is calling the universal self, not the moral self. The Master Zuigan calls is the true self that existed before he was born.*

### Matter-of-Fact Advice

Daiye was a great Zen Master of the Sung dynasty in China, and he had a student monk named Doken who had spent many years studying Zen without much progress. One day the Master sent Doken to a distant place on an errand that would take half a year. Doken was very discouraged because it would hinder his study of Zen in meditation. Doken's friend and fellow monk, Sogen, took pity on him and said, "I will accompany you and help you in whatever way I can so that you can continue to study even while traveling." So both of them set off on the errand.

One evening Sogen said sadly to Doken, "You know, I am willing to help you in every way, but there are five things I can not do for you." "What are they?" asked Doken. "For instance," said his friend, "when you are hungry or thirsty, you must eat or drink by yourself. My eating will not fill your stomach. When you need to respond to the calls of nature, you must take care of them yourself; I can not be of any use. And then, in traveling,

you must carry your own body along this highway." With these remarks, Doken's mind was opened. He did not know how to express his joy.

Sogen said to his friend, "My work is done; you don't need my company any more," and he left. When Doken finished the errand and returned to the temple, Master Daiye immediately perceived the enlightenment of Doken.

*Zen is matter-of-fact teaching. It is the realization of things as they are. Doken was looking for something secret about Zen for many years. But when Sogen gave such matter-of-fact advice, Doken suddenly came to his senses and realized the truth. The Zen truth is everywhere in everyday life. Once experienced, a new world opens.*

**Tipping Over a Water Vase**

Hyakujo wished to send a monk to open a new monastery. He told his pupils that whoever answered a question most ably would be appointed. Placing a water vase on the ground, he asked, "Who can say what this is without calling its name?" The chief monk said, "No one can call it a tree stump." Isan, the cook monk, tipped over the vase with his foot and went out. Hyakujo smiled and said, "The chief monk loses." And Isan became the master of the new monastery.

*The chief monk was still attached to the water vase and tried to say something about it, whereas Isan transcended the problem, or question. To try to answer the question intellectually is a totally wrong approach. Life's questions are answered by the totality of a person's character, not by the extent of one's learning.*

## Original Face

Eno, the sixth patriarch of Zen, received from the fifth patriarch the symbols of authority: the bowl and robe. Because of the jealousy of some of the other monks, Eno left the monastery at night taking the bowl and robe with him. Some brother monks pursued him, intending to wrest the treasured objects from him.

Among them was a tall, extremely powerful monk named Emyo. Eno knew Emyo was coming, so he sat and waited, placing the bowl and robe on a nearby rock. When Emyo appeared, Eno said to him: "These objects just symbolize the truth. If you want them, take them." But when Emyo tried to lift the bowl and robe, they were as heavy as mountains. Trembling with shame, he said: "I came for the teaching, not for material treasures. Please teach me."

Eno instructed him: "Do not think of good; do not think of evil. Show me, instead, your original face." At these words Emyo's entire body was bathed in

perspiration: he was enlightened. In gratitude he said, "You have given me the secret words and meanings. Is there yet a deeper part of the teaching?" Eno replied: "What I have told you is no secret at all. When you realize your own true self, the secret belongs to you."

*"Original face" means your face before you were born. Eno tried to show Emyo the absolute world. In this relative world we attach to this face or that face, to a beautiful face, to an ugly face, to good and bad, to just and unjust, love and hate, big and small, straight and crooked. The original face sees the world before it is divided. The true self is the selfless self. Zen urges: look within. Unmask and strip the ego self; when all your outer self is taken off, you will find your Self.*

**Unmon's Staff**

One day Unmon said to his disciples, "This staff of mine has transformed itself into a dragon and has swallowed up the universe! Oh, where are the rivers and mountains and the great earth?"

*This koan demonstrates the importance of single-pointedness and the power of concentration. Unmon holds his staff high, with full strength, above the eyes of his disciples and speaks of it as if he were holding a live dragon. The group's whole attention is focused on the staff. Unmon has captivated his audience with his staff, and outside of this staff nothing exists. It really has swallowed up the whole universe. When one does something—anything—it should be done with one's whole life, as though nothing else existed. Each day should be lived as if it were the only day in the universe.*

## Inner Culture

Daiji said to his monks, "Brothers, it is better to dig inwardly one foot than to spread Dharma outwardly ten feet. Your inner culture of one inch is better than your preaching of ten inches." In order to balance and clarify this statement, Tozan said, "I preach what I can not practice, and I practice what I can not preach."

*One good deed is better than one hundred beautiful words. In ancient days, as today, words were more numerous than deeds. Daiji emphasizes the importance of doing rather than talking. Tozan flips the coin and states that both speech and action have value; they should not be compared. But both Masters stand firm on one point: look within!*

## The True Man of No Title

Rinzai once said to his monks, "A titleless man lives upon flesh and blood, going out or coming in through the gateways of your face. Those who have not witnessed this fact, discover it this minute!" A monk stood up and asked, "Who is this titleless man?" Rinzai suddenly came down from his seat, seized the monk by his robe, and exclaimed, "Speak! Speak!" The monk was dumbfounded, so Rinzai slapped him, saying, "This titleless man is good for nothing."

*A formless, colorless (titleless) man living upon flesh and blood is a contradiction in the first place. Since he is formless and colorless, this titleless man can come and go any place, but Rinzai says he comes and goes through your eyes, ears, nose, and senses—a further contradiction. When the monk asks, "Who is this titleless man?" Rinzai responds, in effect: "I thought this was the true man of no title, but he is nothing but an attached and deluded man after all." Out of compassion, Rinzai tries hard to awaken the monks from their dreams.*



## Roso Faces the Wall

When monks or laymen came for instruction or with questions, Master Roso would turn his back and face the wall. Nansen, his fellow monk, criticized this method. "I tell monks to put themselves into the time before Buddha was born in the world, but few of them truly realize my Zen. Merely sitting against the wall like Brother Roso would never do the monks any good."

*Communication is a great problem in life—it was in ancient days as well as today, it is in the business world as well as in Zen. There are two types of communication. One is at the level of facts: "I will arrive at ten o'clock tomorrow morning." The other is at the non-verbal level of feelings, sympathy, love. Zen teaching is a communication of life. Roso tries by sitting, wordlessly, facing a wall. Nansen criticizes this method, pointing out that even when he explains Zen, only a few realize the truth; therefore, Roso's wordless method can do no good at all. But people, ancient and modern, become less thinking, less creative, when everything is poured into them. Roso's method may be better after all. When a pupil comes for instruction and the master immediately turns, facing the wall, the student can not ask any questions. He can do nothing but sit quietly, and he has the opportunity to meditate right there because the teacher is in meditation. Thus the student can look within and clarify his own thoughts instead of receiving explanations from outside.*

**Obaku and the Wine-Guzzlers**

Obaku addressed the monks, "You guzzlers of wine! If I had gone on as many pilgrimages as you in search of Zen, wherever should I be today? Don't you know that in all this land there is no Zen teacher?" A monk came forward and said, "But surely there are those who reform the disciples and govern them. What about them?" Obaku said, "I didn't say there was no Zen, merely that there is no teacher of Zen."

*Obaku was the successor of Hyakujo, and he was also Rinzaï's teacher. He was, indeed, a great Zen Master. His remarks are a warning to the monks, many of whom go from one Zen center to another in search of Zen. They will never find Zen by looking in this way. For one who does not seek truly, there are no teachers anywhere to be found. Obaku says there are no teachers, for, in truth, Zen can not be taught. One must look within; there, is Zen. When one lives Zen, there are many teachers.*

## Keichu's Wheel

Getsuan said to his students, "Keichu, the first wheelmaker of China, made two wheels of fifty spokes each. Now, suppose you removed the hub uniting the spokes. What would become of the wheel? And had Keichu done this, could he be called the master wheelmaker?"

*A wheel is a wheel as it is. If you remove the spokes, hub, or rim, there is no wheel. A cart is used to carry things. Remove the wheels, the axle, body, and handle and there is no cart. A house is made of its parts: roof, walls, floor, doors, and windows. A part has no value separate from the whole. So it is with body and life. To discern, discriminate, analyze, and judge is to miss totality. To dissect is to kill. Life is not merely an assemblage of parts.*

## The Three Barriers of Tosotsu

Tosotsu built three barriers and made the monks pass through them: The first barrier is studying Zen. In studying Zen the aim is to see your own true nature. Now where is your true nature?

Secondly, when you realize your own true nature, you will be free from birth and death. When you shut the light from your eyes and become a corpse, how can you free yourself?

Thirdly, if you have freed yourself from birth and death, you should know where you are. When your body disintegrates into the four elements, where are you?

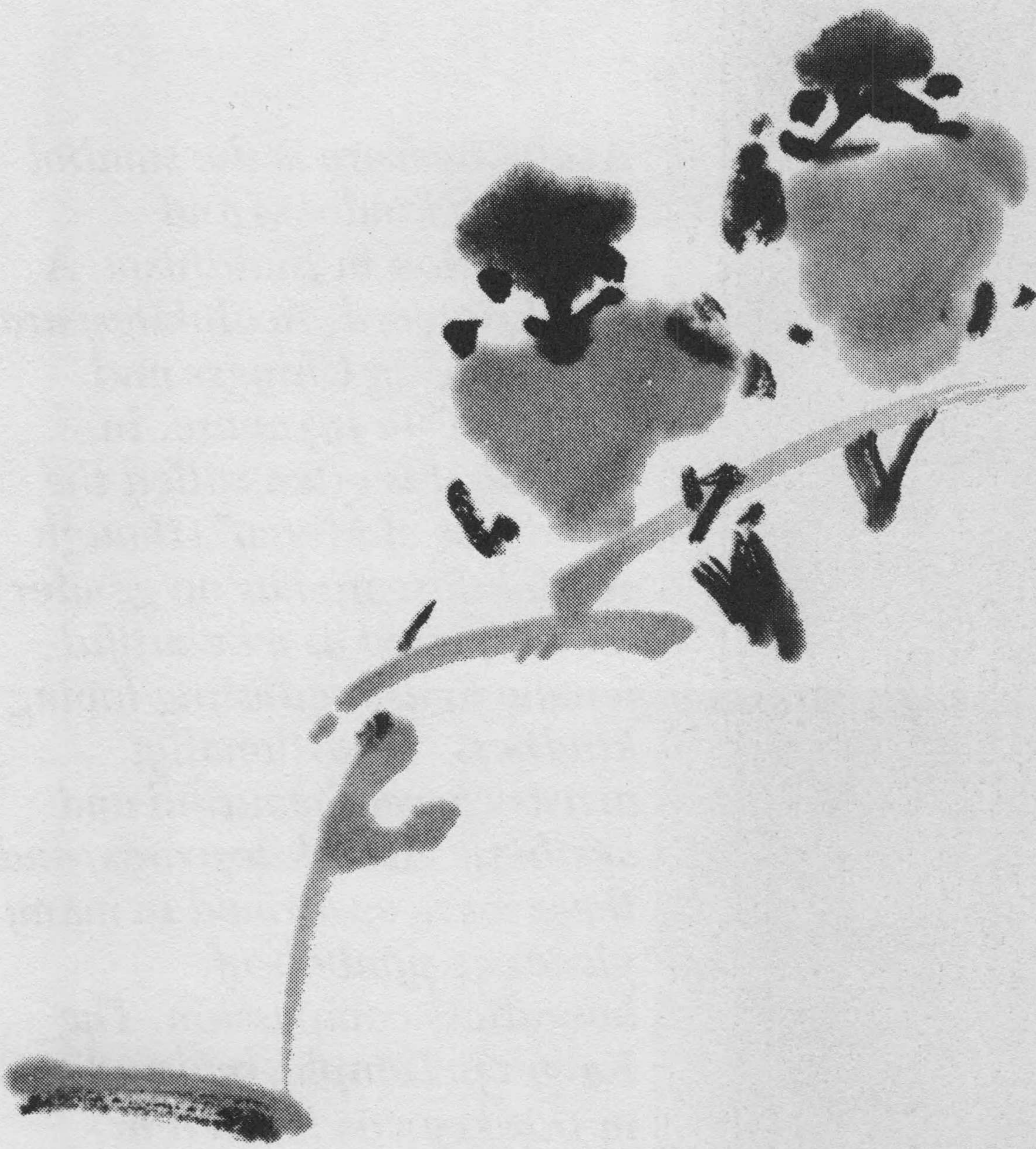
*This koan asks the basic questions of Zen: what is your true nature; how can you be free; and where are you?*

*These questions are also the basic questions of life. If one wishes to live a meaningful, peaceful, and happy life, one must find the answers. Zen is not apart from practical daily life. It teaches how to live by finding the real self. To study Zen is to study self: "What am I."*

### Isan Summons Two Official Monks

Master Isan sent for the treasurer, but when he appeared, Isan said, "I sent for the treasurer, not you." The treasurer did not know what to say. The Master next sent for the chief monk, but when he came, Isan said, "I sent for the chief monk, not you." The chief monk, also, was dumbfounded.

*A Zen Master is always kind, even when he is riding his students, because all his efforts are aimed at inciting progress in Zen. If the treasurer or the chief monk was performing his office with his whole life, either might have struck back at the Master with, "Don't you know, I am the chief monk!" with confidence and pride. But neither said a word. What a pity! They were only occupying their offices.*



## The Statue of Avalokitesvara

The people of Korea once commissioned an artist in China to carve a life-sized wooden statue of Avalokitesvara. The work was completed and the statue carried to the harbor for shipment, when suddenly it became so heavy that no human effort could move it from the beach. The Chinese and Koreans conferred and decided that the statue must remain in China. Thereafter, the statue returned to normal weight and was enshrined at a temple in Ming Chou. A person paying homage to the statue commented, "In the sutra we read that Avalokitesvara is possessed of miraculous powers and in the whole universe there is no place where he does not manifest himself. Then why did this holy statue refuse to go to Korea?"

*Avalokitesvara is the symbol of loving kindness and compassion in Buddhism. A Sanskrit word, Avalokitesvara is "Kanin" in Chinese and "Kannon" in Japanese. In English it is often called the "Goddess of Mercy" (though Avalokitesvara has no gender) and depicted as a beautiful female figure radiating loving kindness. Traditionally, artists carved beautiful and aesthetic Avalokitesvaras, and these were enshrined in many places as symbols of boundless compassion. The Kaigenji Temple, referred to in this koan as located in Ming Chou, China, is not necessarily in China. The Kaigenji Temple is everywhere—in China, Korea, and the United States. If one opens the mind of compassion, Avalokitesvara is everywhere—in your mind and in your heart. If one looks for Avalokitesvara in China, he must return empty-handed.*

## Sixty Blows

*Since it was the first meeting between Tozan and his teacher, Unmon, Tozan was answering the questions very innocently, and he did not understand why he deserved sixty blows. When he asked about it the following day, Unmon said, in effect, "Damned fool! Good for nothing! Waste of time!" The question is whether Tozan's factual, spiritless answers, a result of his lack of awareness, merit the sixty blows or not. A legend says that the mother lion pushes her cubs off a cliff three days after they are born; she will raise the cubs that come back. Life's true lessons are stern. To learn, one must be aware.*

Tozan went to Unmon, who asked Tozan where he had come from. Tozan said, "From Sato village." Unmon asked, "In what temple did you remain for the summer?" Tozan replied, "The temple of Hoji, south of the lake." "When did you leave there?" Unmon asked, wondering how long Tozan would continue with such factual answers. "The twenty-fifth of August," answered Tozan. Unmon said, "I should give you sixty blows with a stick, but today I forgive you." The next day Tozan bowed to Unmon and said, "Yesterday you forgave me sixty blows. I do not know why you thought me wrong." Unmon, rebuking Tozan's spiritless responses, said, "You are good for nothing. You simply wander from one monastery to another." Before Unmon's words were ended, Tozan was enlightened.



## Echu's Three Calls

One day Zen Master Echu called, from behind the closed screens of his room, "Ho! Attendant!" Tangen, his attendant, heard the call from his dormitory room. He went at once to his teacher's room. Kneeling outside the Shoji screens, as was customary, he said, "Yes, master, I am here." But the teacher did not respond. So Tangen persisted, "Do you want something?" Silence. Thinking he had been mistaken, Tangen returned to the dormitory.

Shortly, Echu called again: "Attendant!" Again Tangen responded. Waiting by the paper screens, once again he said, "Yes, I am here. What can I do for you?" Silence. Puzzled and disturbed, Tangen returned to his room.

No sooner had he reached his room than his teacher called a third time, louder than before. A third time Tangen went and waited, saying, "You called three times. I am here." There was a long silence. At last the Zen Master said, "Come in, Tangen." Tangen entered. "You know," the Master continued, "you have been

studying with me for some time now, but you haven't attained enlightenment. I thought it was my fault. I was feeling ashamed of myself for being a poor teacher. But now I see that it is not totally my fault. Instead of apologizing to you, you should apologize to me!"

*Some commentaries say that Tangen did well to respond three times, without artificiality, to his teacher's call. Others say that the Zen Master, recognizing his disciple's potential, was too ambitious, overly anxious to have his pupil attain. When all is said and done, Zen is awareness. Tangen should have been aware of what his teacher meant by calling three times. He was not summoned to perform some actual or material action. The teacher can teach, but only the pupil can learn. The Master can only point the way to awareness. Don't be dumbfounded!*

## Gyosan's Greeting

At the end of the one-hundred-day seclusion, Gyosan met his teacher, Isan. "I did not see you around all summer," Isan said, "what were you doing?" "I have been cultivating a piece of land," Gyosan replied, "and reaped a bushel of millet." "Then," commented Isan, "you did not spend this summer in vain."

"What were *you* doing this summer?" Gyosan asked. The old teacher replied, "I ate once a day at noon and slept for a few hours after midnight." "Then you did not pass this summer in vain," Gyosan said and stuck out his tongue. "You should have some self-respect," Isan observed.

*At Zen monasteries there is a customary three-month summer retreat called Ango. Monks and students meditate and work during this period, which is Zen itself. At the end of Ango the student greets his teacher. This greeting is a test of his understanding. So when the student, Gyosan, met his teacher, Isan, he was proud of his hard work. He was confident and wanted to know if his teacher had been working too. But he was so confident that he was disrespectful. Here, Isan showed himself to be a kind teacher: he did not take offense but cautioned Gyosan to respect himself.*

## Joshu Investigates an Old Woman

A traveling monk asked an old woman directions to Taizan, a popular temple supposed to give wisdom to anyone who worshiped there. The old woman said, "Go straight ahead." After the monk proceeded a few steps, she said to herself, "He also is a common church-goer." Someone reported this incident to Joshu, who said, "Wait until I investigate." The next day he went and asked the same question, and the old woman gave the same answer. Joshu remarked, "I have investigated that old woman."

*Taizan was a famous mountain temple visited by many pilgrims. At the foot of the mountain an old woman kept a small tea house where travelers rested. This old woman was very Zen, and she examined the insight of passing monks. When Zen Master Joshu went to her tea house, he was dressed as a common monk, and he asked the way to Taizan. The old woman gave him the same answer she had given previous monks, and after he had gone a few steps, she concluded that he, also, was "a common church-goer." The conversation (mondo) was the same, but all the other monks had been investigated by the old woman. Only Joshu investigated her. The point of this koan is: where are you? Joshu repeated the actions of the other monks, but he went his own way.*

## A Monk Is Rejected

*The Zen way of teaching is without text, beyond words, from mind to mind in direct contact with the core of life. Zen often uses blows and shouts as well as koans and mondos. Rinzai is famous for his "khats" and Tokusan for his blows. The monk who came to Seppo and made a formal bow was paying the form of greeting and respect proper in Japan and in ancient China. In the West we greet each other by shaking hands, and in Buddhist countries, such as Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, and India, the Buddhists put their palms together in greeting (not in prayer). But Seppo gave the monk five blows. Naturally, the monk was surprised and asked why. For answer he received another five blows and a "khats" in addition. If a greeting comes from an awakened person, it has a profound meaning. But this monk, like so many of us, simply performed a meaningless formality. The number of blows the Master gave has no meaning. The first five were shallow; the second five had deeper meaning. The "khats!" means "wake up!"*

A monk approached Seppo and made a formal bow. Seppo hit the monk five times with his stick. The monk asked, "Where is my fault?" The Master struck the monk five additional blows and dismissed him with a loud, "Khats!"

## Kotei Strikes a Monk

A student of Kassai came to visit Kotei and bowed. Kotei immediately struck the monk. The monk said, "I came especially to see you and paid homage with a bow. Why do you strike me?" Kotei struck the monk again and chased him from the monastery. The monk returned to his teacher, Kassai, and told the story. "Do you understand or not?" asked Kassai. "No, I don't," answered the monk. "Fortunately, you do not understand," Kassai said. "If you did, I would be dumbfounded."

*In ancient China it was the custom that when an individual came into the presence of one more illustrious, the individual would bow in respect. So the monk who visited Kotei bowed. Now the Zen Master usually has a Dharma stick, called a nyoi, which means "can be used as the mind wishes." It is a small stick made of bamboo or wood, and it is sometimes used for back-scratching, sometimes to awaken students. Kotei used his Dharma stick to strike the visiting monk. When the monk asked why, he received more of the same and was driven off. Kotei struck the monk to try to awaken him to his own inner reality. The student was wasting time bowing to others. His own teacher, Kassai, tried to conclude the lesson Kotei had begun, but still the monk failed to wake up.*

## How Do You See Your Buddha-nature?

A monk said to Seppo, "I understand that a person in the stage of a Cravaka sees his Buddha-nature as he sees the moon at night, and a person in the stage of Bodhisattva sees his Buddha-nature as he sees the sun at day. Tell me how you see your own Buddha-nature?" In answer, Seppo struck the monk three times with his stick. The monk went to another teacher, Ganto, and asked the same question. Ganto slapped him three times.

*A Cravaka is characterized as interested only in his own enlightenment. His seeing of Buddha-nature is like seeing the moon at night; it is, more often than not, a reflection. The Bodhisattva is interested in and concerned with all beings. He sees Buddha-nature in all things, just as when the sun shines, its light falls impartially on all. But the monk was an idler, asking someone else how they see their Buddha-nature instead of trying to see his own. It is only natural to give him three blows in hope of awakening him.*

## Solving a Monk's Problem

After a morning lecture to the monks, Yakusan was approached by a monk who said, "I have a problem. Will you solve it for me?" Yakusan answered, "I will solve it at the evening lecture." When all the monks gathered in the hall that evening, Yakusan called out, "The monk who told me this morning that he had a problem—step forward right now!" As soon as the monk stood in front of the assembly, the Master took hold of him roughly. "Look here, monks," he said, "this fellow has a problem." He pushed the monk aside and went to his room.

*Life is living. Truth is concrete. Zen concerns itself with immediacy and directness because Zen is life. A problem that can wait all day for a solution is hardly a problem! Can you wait all day when your head is under water? Yakusan's evening lecture was most dramatic.*

### The Meditation Arm-rest

Ryuge asked Master Suibi, "Why did Bodhidharma come West?" Suibi said, "Pass me that meditation arm-rest." No sooner did Ryuge do so than Suibi hit him over the head with it. Ryuge said, "Strike me as you will, that still does not answer my question." Next, Ryuge went to Master Rinzai and asked the same question. Rinzai said, "Please give me that meditation mat." Ryuge handed the rolled-up mat to Rinzai, who promptly struck him with it.

*Ryuge was an ardent young monk and wanted desperately to attain enlightenment. Since he did not get the answer he wanted from Suibi, he went to Rinzai at another temple and asked the same question. Neither Master, Suibi nor Rinzai, talked to each other on this subject, but their method of answering Ryuge was identical. It is interesting to see the two enlightened minds working in the same way. It seems both Masters were suggesting meditation by hitting Ryuge with meditation equipment. But Ryuge had a one-track mind. He kept expecting to hear a direct answer. There is no one ready-made answer in life. Each must find his or her own answer.*



## The Nose Is Twisted

One day as Hyakujo was visiting his Master, Baso, a flock of wild geese flew overhead. Baso asked, "What are they?" "They are wild geese, sir." "Whither are they flying?" "They have flown away, sir." Baso suddenly took hold of Hyakujo's nose and twisted it. Overcome with pain, Hyakujo cried out. Baso said, "You say they have flown away, but all the same they have been here from the very beginning." Hyakujo attained enlightenment.

*Most of the time in everyday life we are superficial and not aware of true life. Hyakujo saw only flying geese and geese flown away. Perhaps the geese were hungry and searching for food; perhaps they were flying south, knowing cold weather was coming. Hyakujo shows no feeling, no communication, no understanding of life. Baso felt terrible observing his student's shallowness. So instead of saying, "Wake up!" he twisted Hyakujo's nose. Satori, or enlightenment, is the discovery of true life and the inner relationship of this life with all things.*

**Three Worlds, No Dharma**

Banzan said to his disciples one day, "In all the three worlds there is no Dharma. Where, then, shall we look for Mind?"

*The "three worlds" means the whole world, or the universe. (In Buddhism the three worlds that comprise the whole are the world of desires, the material world, and the non-material world of thought.) "There is no Dharma" means the Dharma is everywhere, everything is Dharma. "No Dharma" means no Dharma as such. If one is sincere and disciplined in seeking truth, a trifling thing may open the mind to enlightenment: the voice of a cricket or the sound of a stream.*

## A Garden of Medicinal Flowers

A monk asked Unmon, "What is the Dharma Kaya [the formless, timeless, spaceless ultimate]?" Unmon replied, "A garden of medicinal flowers." The monk then said, "Is that all I need to understand?" Unmon replied, "If that isn't enough, then you will have to see the Golden-haired Lion."

Unmon's koans are beautiful but often difficult to understand. When the monk asked about ultimate reality, Unmon pointed to the flower garden near which, perhaps, they were standing. The words themselves have nothing to do with the true answer. They are only figures of speech. When Gensha was asked the same question, he replied, "Drops of puss." Engo said, "I see the golden Buddha statue in a pile of garbage." The Dharma Kaya is everything and anything if one sees it with the eye of truth. However, if the monk does not have eyes to see the simple truth, he had better resort to the Golden-haired Lion, a legendary Chinese beast.



## Open Your Own Treasure House

Daiju visited Master Baso in China. Baso asked, "What do you seek?" "Enlightenment," replied Daiju. "You have your own treasure house. Why do you search outside?" Baso demanded. "Where is my treasure house?" Daiju asked. "What you are asking is your treasure house," Baso concluded. Daiju was enlightened.

*It seems habitual in this material world for people to look for happiness and freedom in the same way they look for money and fame: outside of themselves. Zen teaches exactly the opposite: always look within. The inner treasure, the Buddha-nature, is always fresh, living, unlimited.*

## Temper

A Zen student came to Bankei and complained, "Master, I have an ungovernable temper. How can I cure it?" "You have something very strange," said Bankei. "Let me see what you have." "I can not show it to you just now," said the student. "When can you show it to me?" asked Bankei. "It arises unexpectedly," replied the other. "Then it must not be your own true nature. If it were, you could show it to me at any time. It is something that you are not born with. It is not you."

*As is often said in Zen, anything that comes from outside is not the real you. It is foreign. One must not be disturbed by outside things. One must realize and return to the center of life. Our greatest mistake is that we think external, accumulated things are ourselves. If one gets rid of all things that are external, then he will be purely himself. For this reason, meditation is an essential part of the awareness of Zen.*

## The Taste of Banzo's Sword

Matajuro Yogyu was the son of a famous swordsman. But his father disowned him because he failed to learn. So Matajuro went to Mount Futara where he found the famous swordsman Banzo. The master said to him, "So you wish to learn swordsmanship under my guidance. But you can not fulfill the requirements." "But if I work hard, how many years will it take me to become a master?" the youth persisted. "The rest of your life," replied Banzo. "I can not wait that long," argued Matajuro. "I am willing to undergo any hardship if only you will teach me. If I became your servant, how long might it be?" "Oh, maybe ten years," Banzo relented. "If I work far more intensively, how long would it take me?" "Oh, maybe thirty years," said Banzo. "Why is that?" asked Matajuro. "First you said ten, and now you say thirty years. I will undergo anything to master this art in the shortest time!" "Well," said Banzo, "in that case you will have to stay with me for seventy years. A man in such a hurry as you

are to get results seldom learns quickly." "Very well," declared the youth, who finally understood the teacher, "I agree."

Matajuro was told never to speak of fencing and never to touch a sword. He cooked for his master, washed dishes, made his bed, cleaned the yard, cared for the garden, all without a word about swordsmanship. Three years passed. Still Matajuro worked on. Thinking of his future, he was sad. He had not even begun to learn the art of swordsmanship.

But one day Banzo crept up behind him and gave him a terrific blow with a wooden sword. The following day, as Matajuro was cooking rice, Banzo again sprang upon him unexpectedly. After that, day and night, Matajuro had to defend himself against unexpected thrusts. Not a moment of any day passed during which he did not have to think of the taste of Banzo's sword. He began to learn so rapidly that he brought smiles to the face of his master. Matajuro became the greatest swordsman in the land.

*This koan demonstrates the Zen way of learning, which includes determination, discipline, awareness, mastery, and the confident, faithful, respectful relationship between teacher and student. Young Matajuro typified the modern temperament: seek the result first and attain it quickly. In Zen the means are the end.*



## The First Age Teaching

A traveling monk asked Unmon, "What is the teaching given by Sakyamuni during his lifetime?" [This is called the First Age Teaching.] Unmon replied, "The teaching confronts each."

*The question means: What did Buddha teach during his lifetime? Gautama Buddha taught for forty-five years, and the written record of that teaching has been compiled into some five thousand forty-odd volumes. But the Buddha's teaching is for each one at each time. It is particular, not general. If one teaching is understood fully, all other teachings are understood. To illustrate: During the Buddha's lifetime, a general on his way to a campaign stopped to see the Buddha. "I am on my way to battle," he said, "and have no time to stay and learn. But," he implored, "please give me one word that summarizes your teaching. I will keep it with me and live it." The Buddha answered, "Awareness."*

**Visible Trunk, Autumn Wind**

A monk asked Unmon, "When a tree withers and the leaves fall, what about it?" Unmon replied, "The trunk is visible in the autumn wind."

*Unmon's school is deep and difficult to understand since its mode of expression is indirect. While it talks about the south, it is looking at the north. In this koan they are talking about the truth of life. When we become aged, all the beauty and strength of youth are gone. However much one tries to hide age, one can not. The autumn wind is blowing.*

*Lonesomeness is there, and the end of life is near, and one knows it. Do not pretend. Be aware that when the leaves fall, the trunk is clearly visible in the autumn wind.*



### **III**

## **Non-attachment**

If Buddhism must be described in one word, that word is non-attachment. The eighty-four thousand teachings of the Buddha could be reduced to non-attachment. Non-attachment and detachment are quite different. Detachment is to cut off one's self from the problem, to get away from it, to escape. But life can not be escaped. Non-attachment is to be one with the problem. Living life is like flowing water. But instead of letting life flow, we attach to favorable conditions and become greedy, or we attach to adverse situations and become angry. We form attachments to words, actions, situations, things, and people. The strongest attachment of all is the attachment to one's self.

## Not Flag, Not Wind

Two monks were arguing about a flag. One said, "The flag is moving." The other said, "The wind is moving." The sixth patriarch, Eno, happened to be passing by. He told them, "Not the wind, not the flag; mind is moving."

*The two monks are attached to external things, flag and wind. Eno denies external things and says it is mind that is moving. In so doing, Eno attaches to mind. But Eno knows better than that—he simply is pointing out the error of attaching to external things. (A Buddhist nun once said to monks who were discussing this same koan: "The flag does not move; the wind does not move; the mind does not move.") The truth is totality, non-attachment. Anything that is conceptualized is not reality. Zen teaches one to see things as they are and to understand without analyzing and conceptualizing.*

## Uteki Asks What Buddha Is

Uteki, the premier, asked Master Dotsu, "What is Buddha?" The Master called abruptly, "Your Excellency!" "Yes," the premier responded without thinking. Then the Master said, "What else do you search for?"

*Everyone wants to know what Buddha (life's reality) is. It is natural to ask such a question. But the explained Buddha is not the real Buddha. Premier Uteki must have asked this same question of many different teachers. He was looking for fish in the tree tops. But when Master Dotsu abruptly called, "Your Excellency!" and Uteki immediately answered, "Yes," that was most natural, immediate, and innocent. There was no conceptualized person or artificial answer. Buddha is one who lives life. Clinging to words or concepts is like holding onto a string of beads—after all the beads have slipped away.*

## The Giver Should Be Thankful

While Seisetsu was Master of Engakuji Temple in Kamakura, Umezu Seibei, a wealthy merchant, donated 500 ryo to build larger monastery quarters. Umezu brought the money in gold to the teacher. Seisetsu said, "All right, I will receive it."

Umezu was quite dissatisfied with this response. He hinted, "In that sack is 500 ryo." "You told me that before," replied Seisetsu. "Even though I am quite wealthy," Umezu continued, "500 ryo is a lot of money." "Do you want me to thank you for it?" asked Seisetsu. "Don't you think you should?" Umezu replied. "Why should I?" inquired Seisetsu. "The giver should be thankful."

*Buddhist giving is called dana, a Sanskrit word meaning to offer, share, or gladly give. Dana is the first of the six Buddhist Paramitas (virtues). Dana does not expect return or thank you. Today, most giving is out of obligation, sympathy, or expediency. Rarely is it joyous giving. Giving from such sources needs to expect thanks. In truth, however, the thankfulness of the giver should be greater than that of the receiver. To love, to be able to love, is richer than being loved. The Buddha created the system of daily begging not only to teach monks humility, but also to teach people dana.*

**Shozan's Phrase**

A monk once asked Shozan, "Is there any phrase that is neither right nor wrong?" Shozan answered, "A piece of white cloud does not show any ugliness."

*The monk asks Shozan to express the essence of Buddhism—the non-attached world beyond right or wrong. A white cloud that moves about from one place to another along a mountain side is natural, pure, and innocent—quite beyond right or wrong. It just is. It comes; it goes.*



## The Moon Can Not Be Stolen

One evening a thief crept into Ryokan's mountain hut. There was nothing to steal. Ryokan returned and caught him.

"You have come a long way to visit me," he told the prowler, "and you should not return empty-handed. Please take my clothes as a gift." The bewildered thief took the clothes and slunk away.

Ryokan sat naked watching the moon and said, "Poor fellow. I wish I could give him this beautiful moon."

*Ryokan is very famous in Japan. He was a Zen monk and poet known for his reverence for life, utter simplicity, kindness, and lack of attachment to material things and affairs. He was also beloved of children. For Ryokan there was no thief, no ugliness, no anger. According to a story, a bamboo shoot started to grow under the floor of his hut. He made a hole in the floor to accommodate the shoot. When it reached the ceiling, he made another hole.*

**This Very Mind**

Daibai asked Baso, "What is Buddha?" Baso said, "This mind is Buddha."

*The answer to this very simple, natural question can be anything. The important thing is not to attach to the words but to understand what the words point to. Everyone presupposes that a Buddha is perfect, noble, sacred, and enlightened. But a Buddha is not such a god-like being, standing apart from everyday life. Buddha-nature is pure, but at the same time it manifests itself in all—even vulgar—things.*

**Mind Is Not Buddha**

Nansen said: "This mind is not Buddha. Learning is not the Way."

*Nansen was a great disciple of Baso. Baso used the words, "This mind is Buddha," to teach Zen all his life. "This mind is Buddha" became famous, the popular answer to the question, "What is Buddha?" To conceptualize the Buddha without living experience is the worst thing possible in Zen. So Nansen said, "This mind is not Buddha. Learning is not the Way." Nansen beautifully dispels the illusion of words.*

**Alone and Poor**

A monk named Seizei asked of Sozan, "Seizei is alone and poor. Will you give him support?" Sozan said, "Seizei?" Seizei responded, "Yes, sir." Sozan commented, "You have Zen, the best wine in China, and already have finished three cups, and still you are saying that your lips are not even wet."

*Poverty is the ideal of the Zen monk—nothing to possess, nothing to depend upon, no place to live. He is completely free, and the whole world belongs to him. When Seizei says that he is alone and poor, he means that he is living the Zen life. Sozan, a Zen Master, knows Seizei inside and out. He knows Seizei is enlightened and is attached to his shallow enlightenment. So he takes Seizei to task, pulling off his mask of pretension and loosening his attachment at the same time.*

## Overturning the Water Pail

Three monks—Seppo, Kinzan, and Ganto—were in the temple garden. Seppo noticed a pail of water and pointed to it. Kinzan said, “The water is clear, and the moon is reflected.” “No, no,” said Seppo, “it is not water, it is not moon.” Ganto upset the pail.

*This mondo (question and answer) ends with a koan. Kinzan states a simple fact: clear water will reflect the moon. Seppo denies this; it is not adequate to describe reality (“not water, not moon”). Each one is correct in his own way, but if either is attached to his idea, trouble will arise. So Ganto kicks over the pail—the object of argument and attachment.*

**A Dung Stick**

A monk asked Unmon, "What is Buddha?" Unmon answered, "A dung-wiping stick."

*All Zen students strive to attain enlightenment and become a Buddha. All look up to Buddha as an ideal—that which is pure and clean, perfect, most honored, the highest. They try to overcome evil, death, humanity, and ordinary life to become such a Buddha. So Unmon, with one blow, tries to destroy this conceptual Buddha by ironically comparing it to the dung-wiping stick used by common people in China in the same way as the corncob was used in early rural America. Buddha is not like God; Buddha is a person who awakens to himself and lives that self as it is.*

## A Buddha

Unsho and Tanzan were two famous Zen monks in Tokyo in the Meiji Era. Unsho visited Tanzan one day. "Hello, brother," Tanzan greeted him, "won't you have a drink?" "I never drink," Unsho solemnly exclaimed. "One who does not drink is not even human," said Tanzan. "Do you mean to call me inhuman just because I don't indulge in intoxicating liquids?" replied Unsho. "If I am not human, what am I?" "A Buddha," answered Tanzan.

*Unsho was a very serious, traditional Zen monk who observed the precepts scrupulously. Tanzan was a carefree, non-attached Zen teacher who taught philosophy at Tokyo University. Unsho believed that all monks should observe the precepts (one of which proscribed drinking) in order to be a true Zen monk. Tanzan was versatile, well-adjusted, and he helped wherever he went, addressing himself to human problems as they arose.*

**The Master Covers His Head**

A monk entered Joshu's room to do sanzen and found him sitting with his head covered by his robe. The monk retreated. "Brother," said Joshu, "do not say I did not receive your sanzen."

*When the Zen student goes to his teacher's room to receive personal guidance, that is called sanzen. To the struggling student sanzen is always a serious encounter, often approached with hope, fear, or despair. In this koan the monk was aghast to find his teacher with his head covered. Was he cold? Sleeping? Attached to his expectations, the monk retreated—but Joshu was not asleep. Though a mountain is covered by clouds, the mountain is there, obscured or not.*



## A Cup of Tea

A professor commuted from Tokyo to Nanin's temple in Kamakura many Sunday mornings to learn Zen. One morning Nanin served him tea. He poured the professor's cup full—and kept on pouring. The professor watched until he could restrain himself no longer. "Sensei!" he protested, "it is overflowing!" Then Master Nanin said, "Like this cup, you are so full of opinions and speculations that there is no room for anything further."

*Often the intellect is a hindrance to enlightenment. One must empty himself before he can learn Zen.*

**Opening Speech of Lazan**

Lord Minwo built a monastery for Lazan and asked him to make the first speech in the lecture hall as master of the institution. Lazan took his seat, put on his robe, took it off, and said, "Farewell!" Then he left the hall. Lord Minwo approached him, saying, "Buddha's teaching at Vulture's Peak must have been the same as yours of today." Lazan answered, "I thought you were a stranger to the teaching, but now I discover you know a little Zen."

*It is said that the best sermon the Buddha ever gave was at Vulture's Peak (Grdharkuta Mountain in India) when he held a flower before the congregation and smiled. Only his disciple Kasapa understood. This silent lecture and transmission was the beginning of Zen. Lord Minwo compares Lazan's lecture to the Buddha's silent lecture. But Lazan knows that the earnest truth-seeker always comes with an empty mind. Knowing a little Zen is worse than knowing none at all.*

## Emperor Taishu's Dream

Emperor Taishu of the Sung dynasty dreamed one night of a god who appeared and advised him to arouse his yearning for enlightenment. In the morning the Emperor summoned the official priest and asked, "How can I arouse yearning for enlightenment?" The priest made no reply.

*Emperor Taishu already yearns for enlightenment; his dream is proof of it. To begin with, enlightenment is not "there" to look for. And the Emperor's very question reveals his dichotomized thinking. The priest knows that the Emperor's whole way of thinking must be destroyed.*



### Nansen Rejects Both Monk and Layman

A young monk presented himself to Master Nansen without the traditional gesture of respect. Nansen commented, "You are too much of a layman." The monk then performed the traditional gesture of respect by placing his hands palm to palm. "You are too much of a monk," said Nansen. The monk did not know what to do next. When another teacher heard of this incident he commented, "If I were the monk, I would drop my hands and back off."

*Young people are always iconoclastic, and young monks in ancient days were no exception. This one challenged the teacher without formal respect. He thought he was free to do anything and need not abide by rules. But being free is not the same as being free from something. Man is free from the beginning; only his attachments bind him. If one clings to nothing, is not attached, then rules and regulations never bother him. Come or go, make obeisance or walk backwards—it makes no difference to a free person.*

**Blockhead**

*The “blockhead” is the center of the question. In Chinese, the word blockhead (Tanbankan) means one who sees only one side of things, as, for example, a man carrying a broad board on his left shoulder can see only the right side of the street.*

*Bokushu says anyone who automatically responds to a strange voice is a blockhead—in the Zen way. But Geccho says anyone who does not respond spontaneously when called is a blockhead. So Bokushu is a blockhead—in the Zen way. Along comes Kaido and criticizes Geccho. But good and bad, right and wrong, young and old, birth and death, east and west, do not really oppose each other. They are complementary. Any individual who attaches to one and ignores the other—he is the blockhead!*

Once, when he passed a strange monk on the road, Bokushu called, “Venerable Sir!” The monk turned. “A blockhead,” Bokushu remarked, then walked on. This event was recorded by some monks, and years later Geccho criticized it saying, “The foolish Bokushu was wrong. Didn’t the monk turn? Why should he have been called a blockhead?” Later still, Kaido commented on this criticism: “The foolish Geccho was wrong. Didn’t the monk turn? Why shouldn’t he be called a blockhead?”

## Crossing a Stream

Tanzan and his disciple were traveling to the next village. They came to a stream, swollen by recent rain. At the edge of the stream stood a well-dressed, beautiful young woman unable to cross because the small foot bridge had been washed away. Seeing her problem, Tanzan offered to help, and lifting the young woman in his arms, he crossed the stream with her and set her down. Then he and his disciple continued their journey. All afternoon the young disciple pondered his teacher's action, for surely, in addition to the five precepts, monks are warned never to approach women, much less take them in their arms! That evening at supper he could contain himself no longer. "Why did you take that woman in your arms?" he asked his teacher. Tanzan replied, "I left the girl back on the other side of that stream. Are you still carrying her?"

*Attachment is clinging to things or ideas and becoming enslaved by them. Zen teaches non-attachment. Tanzan lifted the young woman in his arms simply to help her get across the water; there was no attachment. But the young disciple was attached to the woman even though he did not touch her.*

**Basho's Staff**

Basho said to his disciple,  
"When you have a staff, I will  
give it to you. If you have no  
staff, I will take it away from  
you."

*The staff, as used by monks, originated in India. When a monk went abroad, he used the staff to chase away snakes and animals and to measure the depth of water when he crossed a stream. A staff is to guide and protect one. So modern man must have a staff. Don't be perplexed by the words. Transcend have and have-not. The koan itself tries to guide students to the place where they can lay hold of the true staff.*



## Stone Buddha

Likuko said to Nansen, "In my house there is a stone that sits up or lies down. I intend to carve it as a Buddha. Can I do it?" Nansen answered, "Yes, you can." Likuko persisted, "Can I really do it?" Nansen answered, "No, you can not!"

*The stone is Likuko himself. He asked the Master if he could become a Buddha. Nansen immediately said yes. But Likuko had doubts. So Nansen quickly said, "No, you can not." Zen is not thinking, but doing; not concept, but action. Nansen wants his student to jump in with his whole life.*

**Buddhistic Age**

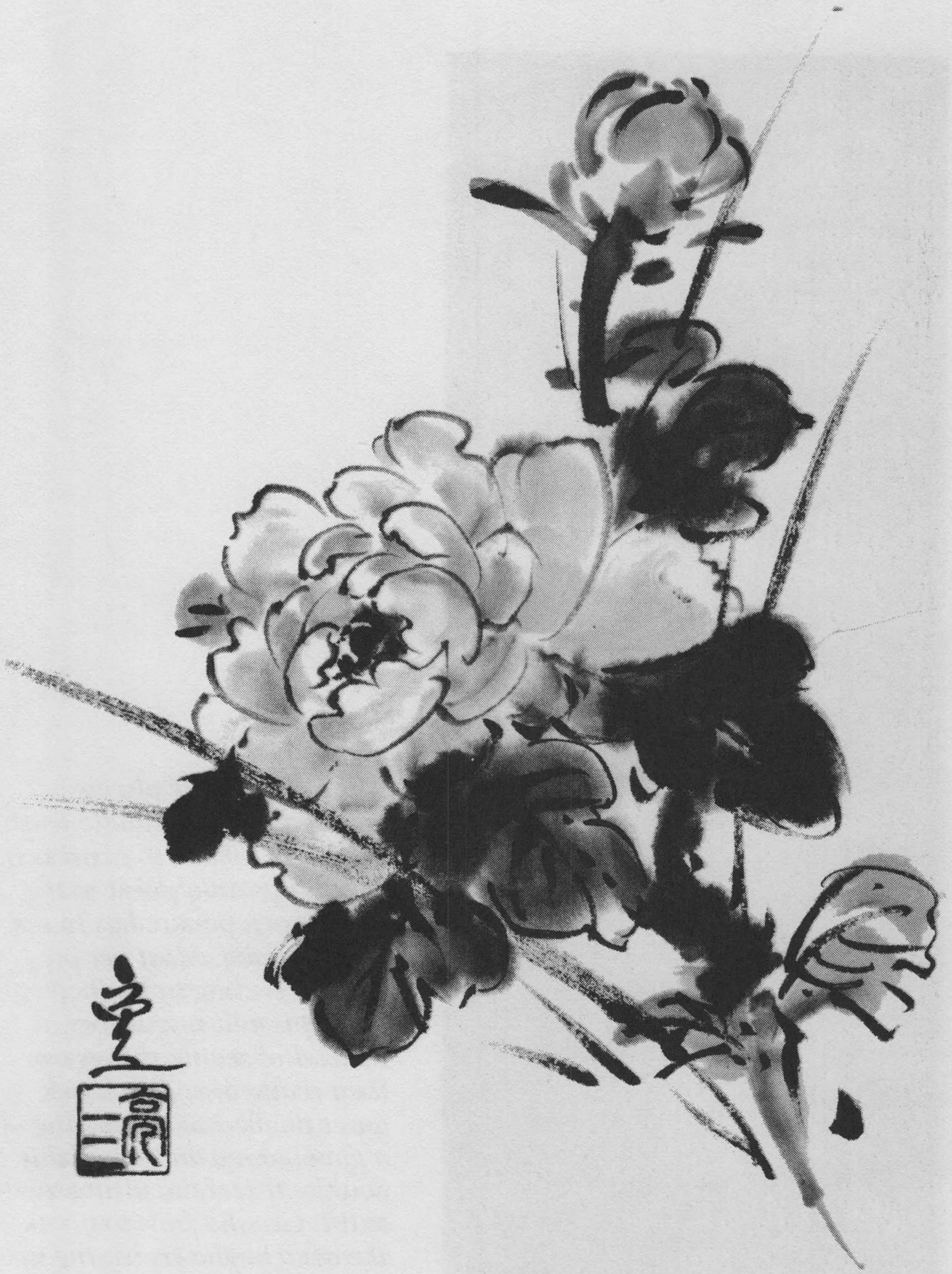
One day Master Nansen delayed taking his seat in the dining room. His disciple and chief monk, Obaku, took the Master's seat instead of his own. Nansen said, "That seat belongs to the oldest monk in this monastery. How old are you?" "My age goes back to the time of the prehistoric Buddha," responded Obaku. "Then," Nansen said, "you are my grandson. Move down." Obaku gave the seat to Nansen but took the place next to it for his own.

*This koan demonstrates the manner in which, at a monastery, the monks constantly challenge each other's understanding of Zen. Constantly aware, they polish each other's wisdom until it is spotless. Obaku took his master's seat. When Nansen demanded his age, he was asking for Obaku's mental, not chronological, age. Obaku gave a tremendous answer, pointing to timelessness, the absolute. But Nansen was the Master, indeed, when he said "move down, grandson." Obaku moved down—but only by one place—and even Nansen couldn't depose him. Zen always transcends the relative. It teaches independence and freedom.*

## The Peony

Jizo and his two elder monks, Chokei and Hofuku, went to view a famous painting of a peony on a screen. Hofuku said, "Beautiful!" Chokei said to Hofuku, "Don't trust your visual organs too much." Jizo said, "Too bad. The picture is already spoiled."

*Hofuku is attached to the picture on the screen. In warning him about this, Chokei becomes attached to the idea of non-attachment. Jizo criticizes them both for their discussion. Are these three monks discussing the real flower or the painted flower? If Hofuku is attached to the visual, Chokei is attached to the auditory, and Jizo is attached to their discussion. We should all bloom fully, not talk about it.*



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## The Ultimate Truth

A monk asked Gensha, "When the old Masters taught the Dharma wordlessly by gesturing with a gavel or a priest's wand, were they expressing the ultimate truth of Zen?" Gensha answered, "No." "Then," the monk continued, "what were they expressing?" Gensha raised his priest's wand. The monk asked, "What is the ultimate truth of Zen?" "Wait until you attain realization," Gensha replied.

*Although we are always exposed to the ultimate truth of Zen, it is hard to express it. Teachings only point to the truth; each person has to see it for himself. Most people, however, cling to their concepts and prejudices instead of seeing things as they really are. This monk was attached to the raising of a gavel or a wand—as if this could express the ultimate truth! Gensha tries to break the attachment by saying no. The negative answer is always a kind answer, though hard to understand.*

## Cutting Trees

Seppo went to the forest to cut trees with his disciple, Chosei. "Do not stop until your ax cuts the very center," Seppo warned. "I have cut it," the disciple replied. "The old Masters transmitted the teaching to their disciples from heart to heart," Seppo continued. "How about your own case?" Chosei threw his ax to the ground, saying, "Transmitted." The teacher took up his walking stick and struck his beloved disciple.

*Students learn Zen not only while sitting in meditation or listening to lectures, but while doing their daily tasks as well. By "the very center" Seppo meant the center of man, of Mind, as well as of tree. Before the teacher had finished his warning, Chosei said, "I have cut it." Seppo changed the subject and asked his disciple whether or not the teaching had been transmitted to him. Chosei needed Seppo's warning after all, for he was still attached to the idea of "transmission." If only he had thrown away the "transmission" as he did the ax! The tree is cut by an ax, but the mind must be cut by Mind. So Seppo chastised his beloved disciple.*

## Blow Out the Candle

Tokusan was a great scholar of the Diamond Sutra. He heard of the Zen school and traveled south to challenge it, carrying his notes and translations of the Diamond Sutra on his back. Reaching an inn, he asked the old lady inn-keeper for some tea and cakes. The old woman asked, "Your worship, what's all that writing you are carrying?" "That's the manuscript of my notes and commentary on the Diamond Sutra," Tokusan replied. The old woman observed, "In that sutra it says, does it not, that the past mind is gone, the present mind is ungraspable, and the future mind is unattainable. Which mind do you intend to use for the tea and cakes?"

Tokusan could not answer her question. He asked her if there were a Zen Master nearby, and she directed him to Ryutan, a great Master. That night Tokusan visited Ryutan and asked him many questions well into the night. Finally Ryutan said, "The night is getting old—why don't you retire?" So Tokusan bowed and opened the screen to go out. But it was pitch

black outside. So Ryutan offered Tokusan a lighted candle to find his way. Just as Tokusan received the candle, Ryutan blew it out. At that moment the mind of Tokusan was opened. "What have you attained?" asked Ryutan. "From now on," said Tokusan, "I will not doubt the teacher's words." And the next day he burned his notes and commentaries.

*This koan compares intellectual academic knowledge with internal enlightened wisdom. Knowledge is external, public, acquired. It is about something. Wisdom is personal, unique, creative; no one can give it, and no one can take it away. Tokusan was a great scholar of the Diamond Sutra (a Buddhist text). He depended heavily on it. When he received the lighted candle from Ryutan, he expected to depend on it to light his way. But after Ryutan blew it out, he had nothing to depend on. One must have an internal light that can never be blown out.*

### Punishing the Sky

A monk asked Funyo, "If there is not a cloud in the sky for ten thousand miles, what would you say about that?" "I would punish the sky with my stick," Funyo replied. "Why blame the sky?" the monk persisted. "Because," Funyo answered, "there is no rain when we need it and no fair weather when we should have it."

*The monk is attaching importance to the state of mind he has achieved which is, perhaps, as clear and uncluttered as a cloudless sky. But the Zen Master strikes at whatever is necessary to awaken truth: monk, teacher, Buddha himself, sky, or universe. Fair weather is only possible when there is rain. Rain is only possible when compared to fair weather. If one attaches to either, problems are created.*



### A Monk's Funeral for a Fox

Once Hyakujo noticed that whenever he lectured on Zen, an old man, unnoticed by the monks, attended the talks. At the end of each talk the old man left. But one day he remained after the audience had gone. Hyakujo asked him, "Who are you?" The old man replied, "I am not a human being. But I once was. I was a Zen Master and lived on this mountain thousands of years ago. At that time, one of my students asked me whether or not the enlightened man is subject to the law of causation. I answered him, 'The enlightened man is *not* subject to the law of causation.' For this answer, evidencing a clinging to absoluteness, I became a fox for five hundred rebirths, and I am still a fox. Will you save me from this condition with your Zen words and let me get out of a fox's body? Now I ask you, is the enlightened man subject to the law of causation?"

Hyakujo said, "The enlightened man is one with the law of causation." At these words of Hyakujo, the old man was enlightened. He said, with a deep bow, "I am

no longer a fox, but I have to leave my body in my dwelling place behind this mountain. Please perform my funeral as you would for a monk." Then he disappeared.

The next day Hyakujo ordered his monks to prepare to attend the funeral of a monk. "What does our teacher mean?" the monks wondered, for no one was even ill. After dinner Hyakujo lead the monks out of the monastery and around the mountain. In a cave he unearthed the corpse of an old fox and performed the ceremony of cremation. Then Hyakujo told his monks the story of the old man.

One of the monks, Obaku, said to the Master, "I understand that a long time ago because a certain Zen Master gave a wrong Zen answer he became a fox for five hundred rebirths. Now I want to ask: if some modern Zen Master is asked many questions and he always gives the *right* answer, what will become of him?" Hyakujo answered, "Come close and I will tell you." Obaku approached Hyakujo and suddenly slapped his

teacher's face, which was exactly the answer Hyakujo had prepared for him! Hyakujo clapped his hands and laughed in approval.

*This koan indicates the pitfall of attachment by using a mondo (question and answer) based on karma (the law of cause and effect). An ancient Master was asked if an enlightened man is subject to karma. He answered "no," showing that he was attached to the idea of absolute freedom. So he was doomed to be reborn as a fox for the next five hundred lives. When this old man asked Hyakujo if the enlightened man really is free from karma, Hyakujo answered that the enlightened man is one with karma. At these words, the old man was finally freed (enlightened). The absolute, if attached to, becomes bondage. Right, if attached to, becomes wrong.*

## Examining Two Monks

Joshu visited a monk, who had retired to meditate, and asked, "What is, is what?" The monk raised a fist. Joshu replied, "Ships can not remain where the water is too shallow." And he left. Joshu went to visit another monk and asked the same question. The monk answered the same way. Joshu said, "Well given, well taken, well killed, well saved." And he bowed to the monk.

*Both monks did the same thing. But Joshu saw that one was not enlightened, and the other was enlightened. This koan resembles "Basho's Staff." Only when one understands beyond forms and gestures can one understand uniqueness. Only when one transcends is and is-not, this and that, can one love without possession, eat when hungry, and rest when tired.*

**Two Monks Roll Up the Screen**

Hogen was about to lecture when he noticed that the bamboo screen, lowered for meditation, had not been rolled up. He pointed to it. Two monks rose, wordlessly, at the same time and rolled it up. Observing them, Hogen said to the audience: "The state of the first monk is good, not that of the second."

*Master Hogen said that one monk was enlightened, the other not. One is right, the other wrong, although both did the same thing, together, at the same time. This koan indicates the idea of the Absolute where sameness is difference and difference is sameness. It is like water in a glass: both look the same; both are transparent. But the water is water, and the glass is glass.*

*On the other hand, perhaps Master Hogen deliberately tried to confuse his students to test their power of understanding. Don't believe something just because the Master says so. Maybe the Master himself is mistaken!*

## Gyosan Draws a Line

Isan said to his disciple, Gyosan, "All day you and I were talking Zen. What did we accomplish after all?" Gyosan traced a line in the air with his finger. Isan said, "It was a good thing you dealt with me. You might cheat anyone else."

*The teacher, Isan, is trying to test Gyosan's understanding. If Gyosan had said, "We didn't accomplish anything," then they would have wasted their time. If Gyosan had said, "We did accomplish something," he would have fallen into attachment and conceptualization. But Gyosan avoided the trap. He drew a line in the air. It is reality, but there is no trace of it. All things in this world come and go, appear, and disappear. But a young, inexperienced student might be beguiled by this beautiful demonstration and mistake the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself.*

### A Monk's Zen Gesture

The librarian saw a monk sitting in meditation in his library for a long time. At length the librarian asked, "Why do you not read the sutras?" The monk answered, "I do not know how to read." "Why don't you ask someone who knows?" suggested the librarian. The monk stood up, put both hands on his chest in a Zen gesture, bowed deeply, and asked politely, "What is this?" The librarian could not tell him.

*The librarian was attached to ideas and formalities: the sutras should be read and a library is the place to read them, not to meditate. But life is not as simple as that. The Buddha spent six years finding enlightenment. Joshu took six years finding the meaning of Mu. The true words can not be asked. The monk who meditated made a sincere Zen gesture and asked, "What is this?" The librarian could not answer, for he did not understand that Buddha's teachings are not necessarily in the sutras.*

### Kyosei's Big Stick

Kyosei asked a new monk from where he had come. The monk answered, "From Three Mountains." Kyosei then asked, "Where did you spend your last seclusion?" "At the Five Mountains Monastery," the monk replied. "And I will give you thirty blows with this big stick," Kyosei said. "Why do I deserve them?" the monk asked. "Because you left one monastery and went to another," Kyosei concluded.

*Maybe this monk is simply going around to different monasteries and enjoying it. On the other hand, he may be searching earnestly for a good teacher. The good teacher soon finds out the quality of the student. Zen discipline is very stern. No ego freedom nor imaginary self-freedom can be permitted. Any attachment deserves blows.*

### Nansen's Little Hut

*A Zen monk lives a very simple, quiet, and free life. When Nansen lived in the mountain hut, a strange monk came to challenge his Zen life. Even freedom is not free if one is attached to it. It is rather easy to free one's self from human pettiness. But without our knowing it we can become attached to Dharma, Nirvana, poverty, and other forms of "goodness." The visiting monk cooked, ate, and slept as if in his own hut. There was no formality, no pretension. The whole world belonged to him. And he broke all the utensils, too—the utensils of meditation, Nirvana, poverty. Nansen really understood the world of non-attachment, and he never forgot the strange, visiting monk for it.*

One day, while Nansen was living in a little hut in the mountains, a strange monk visited him as Nansen was leaving for his work in the fields. Nansen welcomed the monk, saying, "Please make yourself at home. Cook anything you like for your lunch, and then bring some of the leftover food to me along the road heading to my work place." Nansen worked hard until evening and came home very hungry. The stranger had cooked and eaten a meal, then thrown away all other provisions and broken all the utensils! Nansen found him sleeping peacefully in the now empty hut. When Nansen stretched his own tired body down beside the strange monk, the monk got up and went away. Years later Nansen told this story to his students and commented, "He was such a good monk. I miss him even today."



## Preaching from the Third Seat

Gyosan dreamed he went to Maitreya's Pure Land. He arrived late, and only the third seat (a place of highest honor close to the future Buddha) was available. So he sat there. He heard the senior monk announce, "Today, the one who sits in the third seat will preach." Gyosan arose and, hitting the gavel, said, "The truth of Mahayana teaching is transcendent, above words and thought. Do you understand?"

*Philosophers and theologians always analyze and argue about truth. This represents only explaining and conceptualizing. The true teaching of the Mahayana school of Buddhism (to which Zen belongs) is non-attachment, transcending words and thought. Life is not a concept but an actuality—here, now. The Mahayana teaching that Gyosan preaches points to this reality. One must experience it by one's entire life.*

**Mugo's Fancies**

*In China, a National Teacher, or Kokushi, was teacher to the Emperor. The name, Mugo, was given to him by the Emperor and means "no karma." He must have been truly a free man, for karma, the law of cause and effect, is something that binds us all. The only way to transcend karma is to become one with it. Mugo's warning is: if one has even the subtlest idea of or attachment to wise or mediocre, good or bad, right or wrong, birth or death, enlightenment or ignorance, he will be pulled down to the animal kingdom. The animal kingdom is controlled by anger, greed, and ignorance and is the opposite of the Buddha-world or enlightenment. But if we cherish such an idea, we are off the Buddha's Way. Even attachment to Zen will drag one down to the animal kingdom. Transcend attachment by going to the root of it. When you do it, do it. When you die, die!*

Mugo, a National Teacher, said, "If one has fancies about sages or mediocrities, even though these fancies are as fine as delicate threads, they are strong enough to pull him down into the animal kingdom."

## The Government Official

Chinso, a government official, went upstairs with some of his staff members. Seeing a group of monks passing below in the road, one of the staff said, "Are they traveling monks?" Chinso answered, "No." "How do you know they are not?" the staff member asked. "Let us examine them," Chinso replied. Then he shouted, "Hey, venerable monks!" At the sound of his voice they all looked up at the window. "There!" said Chinso, "didn't I tell you?"

*This story demonstrates how most people discriminate and judge by external appearances. The setting is a monastery rather than a government building, so the conversation is strictly Zen. Chinso is not only a high government official, but also a senior student of Zen. The staff members were new Zen students as well as lower ranking officials. Chinso always tried to demonstrate Zen to his colleagues. When one of the party saw several men outside the monastery and wondered if they were traveling monks, Chinso said, "No." It was a good opportunity to show his staff their discriminating minds. When the monks came near, Chinso called to them, and, sure enough, they looked up. But before the staff member could say to Chinso, "Didn't I tell you so?" Chinso said, "Didn't I tell you so." He emphasized the first "no." This "no" is not just "no" for monks; it is "no" for everything. The truth of things, the essence of man, can not be judged by looks. A man who wears a robe is not necessarily a monk. One can*

*not say a man is better than a horse because man speaks. Nor can it be said that a horse is better than a dog. Each has its own precious life. Red is not better than green. Each has its own value. Chinso's "no" applies to all comparative discrimination.*

## The Ideograph for Mind

An old monk wrote the Chinese character for mind on the gate, window, and wall of his little hut. Hogen corrected him, saying, "The gate should have the character for gate, the window the character for window, and the wall the character for wall." But Genkaku, a third monk, commented, "The gate manifests itself without a character, so the window and wall need no sign at all."

*In Buddhism there is the "Mind Only" teaching, which says that all things are created by mind. Things as you see them are only the shadows of your own mind. The old monk put the character for mind everywhere as a reminder. But even truth, if attached to, becomes a concept and a burden. Genkaku pointed out that gate is gate, window is window, and wall is wall. See, understand, use, and appreciate them as they are.*



## Seppo's Punctuality

Seppo, the chief cook in Tokusan's monastery, was always punctual in serving the morning meal. One day Tokusan asked, "What makes you keep the time so accurately?" "I watch the stars and the moon," Seppo answered. "What if it rains or is foggy? What do you do then?" Tokusan asked. Seppo remained silent.

*This koan concerns Seppo, a great Zen Master, while he was still a student under Tokusan. At a Zen monastery everyone shares the work. Here, Seppo was head cook. He was, however, no novice in Zen. Master Tokusan's first question was like the expert thrust of a fencing master: it tested and taught at the same time. What makes you so accurate? Seppo parried, "I watch the stars and the moon." "What if," the master returned, "it rains?" Touché. Seppo lost the duel, but the Master's victory was helping to put the finishing touches on a future Master.*

### Secret Transmission

*Ever since Gautama, the Buddha, attained Nirvana, enlightenment has been transmitted from mind to mind for generation after generation in India (the West) and in China and Japan (the East). What is the truth about this secret transmission? When spring comes, the flowers bloom; when autumn arrives, the leaves turn yellow. The sun rises in the east every morning and sets in the west every evening. Water flows naturally from higher to lower. This is the secret transmission in the East and the West. It is not secret at all. It is the understanding of truth itself. Scholars, theologians, and monks are too much concerned about statements, theories, and creeds. They do not see reality itself. Master Haryo is not forgetful or absent-minded. He is trying hard to show the monk the importance of seeing life directly.*

A monk asked Haryo, "What do the words 'secret transmission in the East and in the West' mean?" "Are you quoting those words from the poem of the third patriarch?" Haryo inquired. "No," answered the monk, "those are the words of Shin Jin Mei." "It is my mistake," Haryo apologized. "I am such a dotard."



## A Higher Understanding

Tozan said to his monks, "You monks should know there is an even higher understanding in Buddhism." A monk stepped forward and asked, "What is the higher Buddhism?" Tozan answered, "It is not Buddha."

*Tozan lived during the Tang dynasty in China, the golden age of Buddhism, and studied under many Masters such as Nansen, Isan, and Ungan. Later, Tozan established the foundations of Soto Zen. Some Zen Masters were rough, raining blows and driving students from the monasteries. But Tozan was kind and understanding. Tozan's remark to his monks (that one should know there is always higher understanding in Buddhism) was meant to counter stagnation. Many people hearing such phrases as "Zen is a way of life," "see things as they are," and "Samsara is Nirvana; Nirvana is Samsara" think they understand Zen and do not study or seek anymore.*

*A monk stood up and asked what is the higher understanding. Tozan answered "not Buddha." To all Zen students who look for enlightenment and attainment, Tozan will say "not Buddha." But to beginners, Tozan will say "it is the Buddha." There are always two ways in learning. One is going forward the other is coming back. We seek enlightenment, Buddhahood,*

*equality, universal oneness,  
but we always come back to  
this worldly life of man,  
particulars, the concrete. We  
see the Buddha in man, the  
universal in particulars,  
oneness in differences,  
equality in inequality,  
balance in imbalance. They  
are two, but they are one. Do  
not attach to the ideal  
Buddha or to the worldly man  
is the advice of Tozan.*

## Preaching Dharma

When Master Gichu had taken his seat to lecture, a layman came from the audience and walked from east to west in front of the rostrum. A monk then demonstrated his Zen by walking from west to east. "The layman understands Zen," Gichu said, "but the monk does not."

The layman approached the teacher saying, "I thank you for your approval." Before his speech was ended, the Master struck him with his stick. The monk approached the Master saying, "I implore your instruction," and was also struck with the stick.

Gichu then asked, "Who is going to conclude this koan?" No one in the assembly spoke. Gichu repeated the question twice. Still there was no answer. "Then," said Master Gichu, "I will conclude it." He threw his stick to the floor and returned to his room.

*The Zen way of transmitting the Dharma is from mind to mind. It is always simple and direct, though it may seem bizarre and irrational. The layman and the monk both demonstrated their understanding. The Master said that the former understood, the latter didn't. But when the layman thanked the Master, he was struck for clinging to approval. The monk, anxious to attain enlightenment, was also struck. The Zen teacher never hesitates to crush students to break attachment, for most of life's troubles and suffering are caused by attachment. Attachment to favorable conditions is greed; attachment to adverse conditions is anger. And the cause of attachment is ignorance. Greed, anger, and ignorance are the three poisons of life.*

### Touching Sanctity

A monk asked Seppo, "How can one touch Sanctity?" Seppo replied, "A simple innocent can not do it." The monk asked, "If he forgets himself, can he touch Sanctity?" Seppo replied, "He may do so only insofar as he is concerned." "Then," the monk continued, "what happens to him?" "A bee never returns to his abandoned hive," Seppo answered.

*Is a child, a simpleton, or a thoughtless person enlightened? Seppo says no. But, the monk persists, if an individual is completely unself-conscious, immersed in the moment (as a child totally immersed in play), is he not, in fact, at one with the universe? Yes, Seppo replies, but only in a limited way. Such one-ness lacks awareness.*

*Look what eloquence:  
Little flowers blooming wild  
All along the fence!*

—Basho

## Buddha's Body

When the Buddha was preaching the Nirvana Sutra, he passed the palm of his hand over his chest, saying, "You should observe my body thoroughly, otherwise you will regret it later. If you say, 'Buddha enters Parinirvana,' you are not my disciple. If you say, 'Buddha does not enter Parinirvana,' you are not my disciple."

*This koan cuts away attachment to words, a cause of great trouble in life. If it is said, "there is," we attach to the "is"; if it is said, "there is not," we attach to the "is not." If one says, "he is bad," we judge him as always bad. Conversely, "she is kind," does not mean she is necessarily always kind. Time and the situation change, and former words do not apply to latter cases. Whether the Buddha goes into Parinirvana or not is simply words. It is a useless discussion.*

*Parinirvana means the complete, or perfect Nirvana, that is, physical death. According to Buddhist philosophy, Nirvana can be attained by anyone, but as long as one has this physical body, there is some residue of the human element, and it is not complete, or perfect Nirvana. Parinirvana is attained only when one dies. So it is said that when Gautama Buddha died, he entered Parinirvana.*

*About the fourth century, A.D., Mahayana Buddhism began to develop the doctrine of Tri Kaya to explain the relationship of "Buddha" to man. Buddha is the Absolute.*

*Buddha is also an ideal and a potential. Buddha is also a living, breathing human being, not only the Gautama Buddha, but all enlightened ones (and unenlightened ones) as well. The Tri Kaya are: 1) Dharma Kaya (formless, colorless, absolute reality; 2) Sambhoga Kaya (the ideal, such as expressed by Amida, the Buddha of infinite love and compassion); and 3) Nirmana Kaya (the actual, physical Buddha, such as the historical Gautama Buddha). The Buddha of Dharma Kaya never enters Parinirvana; the Buddha of Nirmana Kaya does enter Parinirvana.*

*In this koan "Buddha" has different meanings, and one who attaches to any of them lacks true understanding.*

## Daiten's Age

Kantaisu, a Confucian scholar in exile, visited Daiten, whose monastery was situated nearby. He asked Daiten, "How old are you?" In reply Daiten held out his meditation beads and asked, "Do you understand?" "No," said Kantaisu. Daiten then added, "There are 108 beads in the daytime; at night there are 108." Kantaisu was unnerved because he could not understand the old Buddhist monk. When he returned to his home, his wife noticed his mood and inquired why he was so upset. The scholar then told his wife what had happened. "Why not go back to the monastery and ask the monk what he meant?" his wife suggested.

Early the next morning the Confucian scholar went back to the monastery, where he met the chief monk at the gate. "Why are you here so early?" the chief monk asked. "I want to see your Master," Kantaisu replied. "What is your business with him?" the chief monk asked. So Kantaisu repeated the story. "Why not ask me?" the chief monk suggested. So Kantaisu

asked, "What does 108 beads in the daytime, at night 108 beads mean?" In answer the chief monk clicked his teeth three times.

Eventually, Kantaisu was able to see Daiten, and he asked him the same question. In answer Daiten clicked his teeth three times. "I have it!" said the Confucian. "All Buddhism is alike." "You don't say!" said Daiten. "Yes," said Kantaisu, "a while ago I met the chief monk and asked him the same question, and he gave me the same answer you did." Daiten called the chief monk to him and said, "I understand you showed this scholar Buddhism a while ago. Is that so?" "That's true," answered the chief monk. Daiten struck the chief monk and expelled him from the monastery on the spot.

*Kantaisu was a Confucian scholar who had been exiled for opposing certain Buddhist rites connected with the*

death of the emperor. He was exiled to Choshu where Daiten had his monastery. Kantaisu went to Daiten to find out about Buddhism. The question of "age" is just a pretext. For Daiten's first answer, the Master held out a full strand of meditation beads. (The Buddhist meditation beads, symbols of oneness, come in various lengths, but a full strand always has 108 beads.) In essence he was saying, "My age is beyond number and hints; my age is eternal, just as the truth is beyond number and ageless." But the learned Kantaisu did not understand and was quite upset.

The following morning when he met the chief monk at the temple gate and the chief monk clicked his teeth three times, Kantaisu was in further confusion. But when the head of the monastery, Daiten, answered the same question by clicking his teeth three times, Kantaisu thought he finally understood: all Buddhism is the same.

Like Kantaisu, we usually attach to the words or actions and fail to see beyond them. If the actions are the same, we conclude that the meaning is the same also. The three

clicks of the chief monk and Daiten are entirely different. When the chief monk was struck and expelled by the Master, then he really understood life. Kantaisu had opposed Buddhism and was exiled. Because of this very exile he had an opportunity to meet true Buddhism. The truth is the same day or night, as are the 108 beads. The essence of truth is the same, only the forms and appearances change.



## Joshu's Zen

A student asked Joshu, "If I haven't anything in my mind, what shall I do?" Joshu replied, "Throw it out." "But if I haven't anything, how can I throw it out?" continued the student. "Well," said Joshu, "then carry it out."

*The questioner thinks: there is nothing in my mind so how can I throw it out? He has forgotten that the very he himself who thinks does not exist as such. That "self" must be thrown out. That very "self" is the one that thinks there is nothing in his mind, and it is that self that is the cause of the trouble, the author of the question. The greatest attachment and the hardest to see is attachment to self. When one realizes he is attached, then he is already transcended.*

### Mokusen's Hand

Mokusen lived in a temple in the district of Tanba. One of his temple members complained of his wife's stinginess. Mokusen visited the member's wife and put his clenched fist before her face. "What do you mean by that?" the surprised woman asked. "If my hand were always like that," Mokusen said, "what would you call it?" "Deformed," replied the woman. Then he opened his hand flat, held it in front of her face, and asked, "Suppose it were always like that. What then?" "Another kind of deformity," said the wife. "If you understand that much, you are a good wife," said Mokusen and left. After his visit, the wife helped her husband to distribute as well as to save.

*What did this woman perceive from Mokusen's visit? She saw her own deformity. We are quick to see the deformity of others but are usually oblivious to our own.*

## No Water, No Moon

Chiyono, a nun, studied many years under Zen Master Bukko at the Engakuji Temple in Kamakura. Still, she could not attain the fruits of meditation. One moonlight night she was carrying water carefully in an old wooden pail girded by bamboo. The bamboo broke, and the bottom fell out of the pail. At that moment she was set free. Chiyono said, "No more water in the pail, no more moon in the water."

*The old pail is Chiyono; it is also you and I. The greatest attachment is attachment to one's self. The harder Chiyono tried to attain enlightenment, the more self-conscious she became. She was so careful to try and save the pail from breaking. In life we take endless pains to preserve our ego self. We rarely put our whole life into anything. Afraid of failure, timid, we go half way, seldom all out. Nothing is really accomplished unless one's whole life is invested in it—100%—until you are broken. When the ego self is broken, the real self begins. That is why, in Zen, it is said, "You die!"*

## The Opposite of Statement

A monk asked Unmon, "What would the Gautama Buddha have said if there were no one to hear and no occasion to teach?" Unmon answered, "The opposite of statement."

*When the monk in this koan asks what Gautama would have done if there had been no one to hear his teaching and no occasion to teach it, Unmon answers very simply: if there is no need of teaching, the Buddha will not say anything. It is exactly the opposite of teaching. Generalized truth is not living truth. Truth is always concrete and unique.*

### Front Three, Back Three

At a time when the government persecution of Buddhism had just abated, monk Mujaku traveled to visit Monju, whose monastery was on Mount Godai in north China. Monju asked him, "Where have you recently come from?" Mujaku answered, "From the south." Monju continued, "Southern Buddhism, how is it faring?" Mujaku said, "Well, the Third Age monks are more or less observing the precepts." Then Mujaku asked, "How are things in this part of the country?" Monju answered, "Worldly men and holy men are living together like snakes and dragons mixed." Mujaku asked, "Are there many or few?" Monju answered, "Front three, back three."

*This koan is a dream story created by Mujaku. That Mujaku perhaps visited Mount Godai in northern China is true. But the conversation in this koan is between Mujaku and the spirit of Mount Godai, Monju (who is the symbol of wisdom). Monju asks Mujaku where he came from, the usual question when a monk visits another temple or monastery. Mujaku came from the south, but this south is not necessarily the geographical south. It really indicates how Buddhism is practiced: by Third Age monks who merely observe the precepts but can not*

*convey true Zen. (The First Age of Buddhism is that time in the world when the teachings are correctly practiced and lived; the Second Age is a time of only formalities; the Third Age is the last Age when even the formalities have been abandoned.)*

*Then Mujaku asks Monju the same question. Monju replies, in effect, that there are genuine Buddhists and mediocre Buddhists; one must see clearly. Mujaku asks how many there are. This is a very foolish question for the truth is not a matter of number. How many Christians and how many Buddhists are there in the United States? One good Christian and one true Buddhist means something; one thousand name-only Christians or Buddhists has no meaning. Monju answers "Front three, back three," which means that the number is not important and has no meaning.*

## The Cobra

One day Seppo told his monks, "There is a cobra in the South Mountain near this temple. You should all have a good look at it." Chokey said, "The men in this temple today are half dead with fright at the mere thought!" One monk pointed to Gensha, indicating that Gensha ought to go. Gensha declined, saying, "Let Brother Chokey be the first to go. But even if he does, I won't go." "Why not, Your Reverence?" asked the monk. "Because," Gensha answered, "one can die without climbing all over the South Mountain." Suddenly Unmon startled them all by hurling his staff down violently at Seppo's feet.

*Zen temples often were located in mountains, and the temple ground was mountainous terrain. In order to reach a Zen temple in the first place, one had to climb a mountain. Seppo said there was a cobra near the temple, and he urged his monks to go and look at it. One might be bitten; it might cost one's life. Or, one who was wise, or enlightened, might look at the cobra without harm.*

*In order to climb to the summit of Zen, a student must meet more than one cobra on the way. In order to reach Satori, one must pass through hard disciplines and encounter many challenges. When one seeks the truth, one must seek it with life.*

*Enlightenment can not be attained by mere intellect. An illiterate can awaken as well as an intellectual. But, most likely, intellectuals will be bitten by the cobra before they are born into the world of life. Unmon transcended them all.*

### The Sound of Raindrops

Kyosei asked a monk one day, "What is that noise outside?" The monk answered, "That is the voice of the raindrops." Kyosei said, "All living things are upside down, deceived as to their true nature and pursuing objects." The monk then asked, "What about yourself, sir?" Kyosei answered, "I am near to not being deceived about myself." The monk asked, "What does 'near to not being deceived' mean?" Kyosei replied, "Talking in the abstract is easy enough, but explaining reality with words is difficult."

*To be upside down, deceived about one's own true nature, and pursuing objects is to be unenlightened. The monk asked Kyosei, "What about yourself?" Kyosei answered, in effect, that overcoming deception and attaining enlightenment is not hard, but overcoming deception and transcending enlightenment is difficult. True and real enlightenment is non-attachment to either deception or enlightenment.*



## Dust-Speck Samadhi

Unmon was asked by a monk, "What is the dust-speck samadhi?" Unmon replied, "Inside the bowl is rice; inside the pail is water."

*The dust-speck samadhi is illustrated in the Avatamsaka Sutra. Samadhi is a deep concentration. In true samadhi numerous worlds are revealed in a speck of dust; a speck of dust contains the whole universe. It is similar to Leibnitz's theory of microcosm. Unmon simply replied, "Inside the bowl is rice; inside the pail is water." It is a matter of fact. A speck of dust contains the whole universe if we have the samadhi to see it. If one looks within, the whole world, the whole universe is in one's self. A speck of dust or a person or a rose—what is the difference? The reality is the same.*

## **IV**

# **Naturalness**

Naturalness is central to a serene life. Naturalness is to be in accord with the way of nature. Man is part of nature. But modern science, technology, and mechanization are so dominant that our life seems far from the natural life. Modern pragmatic scientists even talk about “conquering” nature. To be natural is to be at ease. Much of the nervousness, worry, and pressure felt by the contemporary individual is rooted in artificiality. Men and women worry about their appearance and their image. Both, more often than not, are artificially created. True beauty is natural beauty. The true self is natural.

## Meeting a Zen Master on the Road

Goso said: "When you meet a Zen Master on the street, how do you greet him?"

*A Zen Master is an enlightened one. Whether you greet him with words or silence, he knows you inside and out. There is no use to pretend. Often when we meet others, we create a double self: front and back, inside and outside. But when there is no front and no back, the mind is serene; it is natural. In the world of naturalness there is peace and beauty and serenity. And the world is but a reflection of your own mind. The enlightened world is the world beyond words and silence.*

## Washing the Bowl

A monk told Joshu: "I have just entered the monastery. Please teach me." Joshu asked, "Have you eaten?" The monk replied, "Yes, I have eaten." Joshu said: "Then you had better wash your bowl." At that moment the monk was enlightened.

*Zen is everyday life: natural, orderly. Things are done one at a time. The truth is simple and direct. Trouble comes from conceptualization and speculation.*

**Perfect Understanding (Daitso Chiso) Buddha**

A monk asked Seijo, "I understand that a Buddha who lived before recorded history sat in meditation for ten cycles of existence and could not realize the highest truth and so could not become fully emancipated. Why was this so?" Seijo replied, "Your question is self-explanatory." The monk asked, "Since the Buddha was meditating, why could he not fulfill Buddhahood?" Seijo said, "He was not a Buddha."

*By meditation one does not become a Buddha, an emancipated one. One is emancipated from the beginning. In meditation the Zen student finds that he was always a Buddha, Buddha does not become Buddha; he is already Buddha. Trees, stones, flowers, sun, and moon—all are Buddha. Why not humankind?*

## The Wooden Ball

One day Seppo began a lecture to the assembled monks by rolling a wooden ball down from the platform. Gensha retrieved the ball and replaced it on the platform.

*Often the simplest, easiest action seems complex. Seppo rolled a wooden ball off the platform. The monks thought it must have some deep meaning. Gensha, an outstanding student, picked it up and replaced it. Where is the hidden meaning? If someone drops something, pick it up and give it back. If it starts to rain, come inside. Things are as natural as that. When a problem arises, don't attach to it; observe it and solve it totally instead of locally. The melon is round and the cucumber curls. Such is their nature. You can not say a circle is better than a square. Seppo rolled the ball; Gensha picked it up. The first action has a beginning but no end; the second action has an end but no beginning. Neither is more meaningful.*

## A Million Objects

Gyosan asked Isan, "If a million objects come to you, what should you do?" Isan answered, "A green article is not yellow. A long thing is not short. Each object manages its own fate. Why should I interfere with them?" Gyosan bowed in homage.

*Gyosan asks a very practical and appropriate question. We live in a complex society, and a million things demand our attention. How can one be serene in such an environment? Isan gives a beautiful and practical answer: meet things as they come, one by one. People habitually worry about many things, but Gyosan takes one thing at a time. He sees, clearly, things as they are.*



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## Carrying the Bundle Under His Arm

Tokusan arrived at Isan's temple carrying his pilgrim's bundle under his arm. Inside the temple he walked back and forth from east to west and from west to east, looked carefully around, and muttered, "Nothing, nothing." Then he left.

Once outside the gate he reconsidered his opinion, saying, "Too careless to obtain a proper view." So he entered a second time and examined the temple. This time the Master, Isan, was seated in his place of authority. Seeing him, Tokusan paid him reverence as befits a new arrival seeking instruction. Isan took up his ceremonial whisk, but Tokusan shouted, brushed the Master's arm aside, and went out again.

When evening came, Master Isan asked, "That recent arrival, where is he?" The chief monk said, "He turned his back on the temple and went away for good." Isan commented, "After this, that young man will go to some isolated mountain top, establish a hermitage, laugh at the Buddha, and insult the patriarchs of Zen."

*This koan concerns Tokusan as a young man—posturing, critical, self-satisfied. (In later years he became a great Master.) Here, Master Isan reprimands the young monk's egotism. Tokusan thinks he has attained enlightenment and knows everything. He visited Isan's temple as if he were the Master; there is nothing significant in his eyes. Master Isan recognized Tokusan's empty enlightenment and self-boasting.*

*It is said that before one studies Zen, mountains are simply mountains, rivers simply rivers; when one has studied Zen for a while, mountains are no longer mountains, rivers no longer rivers; but when one has mastered Zen, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers. Truth is naturalness. It requires no dramatization.*

## Hoju Turns His Back

Joshu visited Hoju one day. When Hoju saw him coming, he turned his back. Joshu spread his mat and prepared to bow to Hoju, but Hoju immediately stood up and returned to his room. Joshu picked up his mat and left.

*This is a wordless koan, a tremendous challenge and response. Seeing Joshu coming, Hoju turned away, offering no words or explanation. Joshu, very naturally, spread the mat that all Zen monks carry and prepared to pay respect as he should. But Hoju stood up and went to his room. Joshu, instead of thinking, "Ah, there must be some deep meaning in that," simply rolled up his mat and left. Joshu was as natural as the wind in the pine branches, as natural as a shadow that follows an object or a sound that creates an echo. One comes and one goes. It's a very peaceful movement. Joshu is like a fisherman who goes fishing, encounters rain, puts on his rain gear, and returns home without casting his line. It was just such a day.*

## The First Principle

Master Kosen was asked to write the Chinese character "Daiichigi," meaning "The First Principle," so that it could be carved into wood and hung on the huge gate of Obaku Temple. His disciple prepared a large quantity of black ink. Kosen wrote carefully. The disciple, usually not critical, said, "That is not good." Kosen tried again. "How is that?" he asked. "Poor." Kosen tried again. "Worse than before," the disciple said. Kosen wrote, one after another, eighty-four "The First Principles," still without his disciple's approval. Then the young man had to step outside for a moment, and Kosen, thinking this was his chance to escape his pupil's gaze, hurriedly wrote "The First Principle." The young man returned almost immediately, saw the character, and said, "Ah, a masterpiece."

*Beauty is naturalness. Selflessness is the essence of natural art. Flying over China, one can look down and see the broad, long Yangtze River. The blue river is banded on both sides by dark green vegetation, which, as it grows farther from the river's edge, becomes lighter green, then yellow-green, then yellow, until it diffuses into a barely perceptible hue. This is nature's large brush painting.*

**Possessed of Insight**

Chinso, a very high government official, came to visit the scholar-monk Shifuku. As soon as Chinso entered the study, Shifuku inscribed a circle in the air with his finger. Chinso objected, saying, "I have just arrived; I have not even had time to sit down. Why do you make mysterious signs?" At this, Shifuku rose and closed his study door to insure privacy for himself and his new disciple.

*When Shifuku drew a circle in the air, he was testing his visitor. There are many ways to react. One understands and responds to a teacher according to one's understanding. One may not understand at all or one may pretend to understand. Chinso reacted naturally and honestly; he did not understand. Shifuku saw his potential as a Zen student. When Shifuku closed the door, it signified that Chinso was accepted as his disciple.*

## Tokusan's Bowl

Tokusan went from the meditation hall to the dining room holding his bowl. Seppo was on duty cooking. When he met Tokusan, he said, "The dinner drum is not yet sounded. Where are you going with your bowl?" So Tokusan returned to his room. Seppo told Ganto about this. Ganto said, "Old Tokusan did not understand the ultimate truth." Tokusan heard this remark and summoned Ganto. "I have heard," he said, "you do not approve my Zen." Ganto admitted this indirectly. Tokusan said no more. But the next day Tokusan delivered an entirely different kind of lecture to the monks. Ganto laughed and clapped his hands, saying, "I see our old man understands ultimate truth indeed. None in China can surpass him."

*Both Seppo and Ganto were students of Tokusan. Master Tokusan was about eighty years old when Seppo sent him back to his room with his bowl and Ganto criticized his Zen. Tokusan neither explained nor excused himself. He understood the two students and himself. He was well-matured, completely natural. True life needs no excuse, no explanation. As for the following day's lecture being entirely different, perhaps Tokusan just presented himself as he was, not as a Master to teach students. There is no ultimate truth as such. What one is, is the ultimate truth. Tokusan was indeed a great Master.*

## Kasapa's Preaching Sign

Ananda asked Kasapa, "Buddha gave you the golden robe of successorship. What else did he give you?" Kasapa said, "Ananda." Ananda answered, "Yes, brother." Said Kasapa, "Now you can take down my preaching sign and put up your own."

*Kasapa and Ananda were the two outstanding disciples of the Buddha. Kasapa became the first successor (symbolized by the golden robe) when the Buddha died. So when Ananda asked his elder brother monk what else the Buddha had given him, Kasapa answered by saying, "Ananda." When Ananda answered, "Yes, brother," at that instant they communicated. Kasapa refers to this mutual understanding when he tells Ananda to replace his preaching sign. Truth is transmitted without a word, just as love is communicated without a word. When two persons are in love, it is needless to say, "I love you." Just by calling his or her name, love is understood and communicated. How subtle and beautiful it is.*

### Tapping the Arm-rest

At Nansen's monastery one day, the cook monk, Tenza, was entertaining the gardener monk, Enju. While they were eating, they heard a bird sing. The gardener monk tapped his wooden arm-rest with his finger, and the bird sang again. The gardener monk repeated the action, but the bird did not repeat his song. Then Enju turned to the cook monk and asked, "Do you understand?" "No," answered the cook monk, "I do not understand." The gardener monk tapped the wooden arm-rest for the third time.

*A bird sang. The gardener monk tapped the wooden arm-rest as if responding to the bird. The bird sang again. The gardener tapped again, but the bird had flown away. The bird sings as nature calls and does not stay long in one place. The gardener monk knows this and asks the cook monk, "Do you understand?" The cook monk does not understand, so the gardener monk taps a third time, so naturally. The gardener monk hears the Dharma everywhere: in the bird's song, in the wind's song, in the insect's cry, in sunshine, in flowers, even in the cook monk's immediate and innocent answer: "I do not understand." That third tap was as serene and natural as the water lily in the morning sun. The lily grows in water but is never wet. Its roots are in mud, but the lily is never defiled.*





## Preceding Teachers

Kaku asked his Master, Tokusan, one day, "Old Masters and sages, I suppose, have gone somewhere. Will you tell me what became of them?" "I do not know where they are," came the reply. Kaku was disappointed. "I was expecting an answer like a running horse, but I got one like a crawling turtle." Tokusan remained silent, as if defeated in argument.

The next day, after his bath, Tokusan came into the sitting room where Kaku served him tea. Tokusan patted his attendant on the back and asked, "How is the koan you spoke of yesterday?" "Your Zen is better today," answered the monk. But Tokusan remained silent, as if defeated in argument.

*Tokusan's attitude is as natural as a loosely hung curtain swaying in the wind. Kaku is an intelligent disciple—but his challenge is met with no resistance: "I do not know where they are." Kaku is disgusted and delivers an insult to his teacher. But Tokusan makes no effort to defend himself. The next day Tokusan's attitude is new and fresh; however, Kaku still has the same thing on his mind. So Tokusan asks him kindly, "How is the koan you spoke of yesterday?" This time the disciple is full of praise for his Master's Zen—but Tokusan remains as silent to praise as he had been to criticism. A hanging curtain blows forward and backward in the wind. Naturalness is the way of the wise.*

## Meeting Students

One day, while talking with his monks, Sansho remarked, "When a student comes, I go out and meet him with no purpose of helping him." When Koge heard of this remark, he commented, "When a student comes, I do not often go out to meet him, but if I do, I will surely help him."

*Sansho and Koge were both disciples of Rinzai, founder of the Rinzai school of Zen. They here take exactly opposite positions, but their meaning is the same. Sansho claims that he goes out to meet students with no predetermination to teach. Koge says let the student come to him, and he will surely try to teach. Each one's way of teaching is true, unique.*

## Managing the Monks

Kyujo was the managing monk of Rakufu's monastery. One day he ordered: "Monks from the first to the middle seats, go out to work in the field. Remaining monks, go to the mountain for wood." "What is Manjusri to do?" asked the chief monk. "My order goes only to those monks seated on cushions," answered the managing monk. "Manjusri has nothing to do with the order." Later, Engo commented on this dialogue and said, "If I were questioned that way by the chief monk, I would answer, 'The path is like a mirror. It does not move itself, but reflects all that comes.'"

*In each Zendo, or meditation hall, there is a statue or painting of either Manjusri or Bodhidharma. When Kyujo divided the monks into two groups in order to do the work more efficiently, the chief monk asked what Manjusri was to do. Kyujo replied, in effect, that Manjusri does his own work, independently, as the sun shines. As managing monk, Kyujo manages the monks and nothing else; he has nothing to do with Manjusri. Each one attends to his own work without a sense of duty, ostentation, or pride. A pine tree stands on the cliff in the snow showing its fresh green needles. There is no intention of showing off, for the green needles are its life expression. In Japan the plum blooms in February despite the snow. It blooms in the snow because that is its nature, and not to show off its bravery. As Engo commented, the path works as the mirror reflects. If A comes, it reflects A; if B comes, it reflects B. It works as causes and conditions are present. There is no artificiality or ego in the reflections. How nice it is*

*when one reflects things as they are! The mirror of man has become selfish and reflects his wishes and attachments. So even the mirror should be destroyed. Then one will be completely free.*

### Scented Grasses, Falling Flowers

One day Chosa went for a walk. When he returned, the monk who was gatekeeper inquired, "Where have you been, sir?" "I have been strolling about in the hills," Chosa answered. The gatekeeper asked, "Where in the hills?" Chosa said, "At first I followed the scent of the grasses. Then I wandered among the falling flowers." "Ah," said the gatekeeper, "it is very much like spring." "Better," Chosa rejoined, "than the cold autumn dew on withered lotus stems."

*Zen life is profoundly selfless, as is walking through the hills naively enjoying the scent of grasses and shrubs and scattered flowers. The enlightened one enjoys the world fully with a child-like freshness. "Better than the cold autumn dew on withered lotus stems" means better than old monks who chant, meditate, and discipline themselves at the temple. Of course, these things are good, too. The Zen life enjoys both strolling in the hills and "autumn dew."*



## The Self Perishes When the Universe Perishes

A monk asked Daizui, "When the whole universe perishes, does the self perish or does it not perish?" Daizui said, "It perishes." The monk persisted, "Then, following the universe, will the self perish?" Daizui replied, "Like all the rest, it will follow and depart."

*This young monk apparently learned about eternal life and believed in it as such. But then he read the Agama Sutra, which describes the utter and complete destruction of the universe. His question to Daizui betrays his fear of death. Daizui answered, in effect, "Yes, when the universe perishes, we perish too. You also will die." Zen teaches no miracles, just things as they are.*

*Many people are afraid to die. Death is neither bad nor good. It is natural and should not be feared. Those who are born will die. We should not be anymore concerned about our death than we were about our birth. When the universe disappears, we disappear. Why worry?*

**V**

## **What Is Zen?**

Many koans ask what is Zen, or what is Buddhism? Is Zen a religion? Yes, because it deals with life and death. But it does so without belief in a supernatural being (god) or realm (heaven, hell). Most religions are based on faith, salvation, and prayer. Zen is based on the factual truth of life, enlightenment, and meditation. It points to the essence of the life we all live. Knowledge is not sufficient to reach the core of life, so Zen can not be taught. It is understood only through one's own experience.



### Three Days

One day Unmon said to his disciples, "If you don't see a man for three days, do not think he is the same man. How about you?" No one spoke, so he said, "One thousand."

*Here Unmon speaks the very essence of Buddhism. All things are in constant change; nothing is permanent. Life is constant becoming. All people, whether they think so or not, are ever-changing. Every day is a new day. Even fish do not swim in the same place for a day. Certainly three days can make a different person! Unmon answered himself by saying, "One thousand." Of course, it is not the number 1,000. Rather, it means multiplicity, continuous changes without number. It means meet each day with a fresh attitude. Do not cling to yesterday, and do not judge by yesterday. Live each day's new life fully.*

### Yakusan's Lecture

Yakusan had not delivered a lecture for some time, so at last the chief monk came to him and said, "The monks miss your lectures." "Then ring the calling-bell," Yakusan said. When all the monks had assembled in the lecture hall, Yakusan returned to his room without having said a word. The chief monk followed him, protesting, "You said you would give a lecture!" Yakusan replied, "Lectures on sutras should be given by scholars of the sutras. Why do you bother this old monk?"

*Zen is living life. So every day and every hour in the life of a Zen Master is a living lecture. At Yakusan's monastery the monks missed his lectures. This was a great surprise to Yakusan for he was giving lectures every minute of every day. But the monks did not hear them. If you want an explanation of the sutras, then ask the scholars. A Zen monk who can not hear the wordless lecture is not worthy to be called a Zen student. How about people today? In the Amida Sutra it is said that mountains, rivers, trees, flowers, and winds are lecturing the Dharma.*

**Shiko's Poem**

For thirty years by a  
mountain lake  
I've lived, alone and free,  
Two meals a day, though  
monkish fare,  
Are sustenance for me.  
Up and down the  
mountainside  
For daily exercise,  
And whether people  
understand,  
I neither know—nor can  
surmise.

*A bird flies freely in the sky  
and leaves no trace in the air.  
Water flows freely in a river;  
if it stops flowing, the water  
becomes stagnant. A white  
cloud moves over mountains  
and canyons changing shape  
as it goes. So a true Zen monk  
lives a simple, full life without  
entanglements, without  
expecting praise or  
recognition. His serenity is  
never jeopardized by power,  
praise, or blame. Shiko lived  
such a life for thirty years on  
the mountain—every day of it  
a silent preaching.*

### Three Pounds of Flax

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

*Tozan was asked "what is Buddha?" while he was working. He immediately raised the bundle of flax (which weighed three pounds) that he had in his hand at the time. Many think a Buddha is some superior being, different from ordinary people. Tozan destroys this fixed image by demonstrating things as they are. Buddha is Nyorai, or Tathagata, which means "thus come." D. T. Suzuki called it "suchness" or "thusness." "What is Buddha? Three pounds of flax." The answer is immediate — no artificiality, no human thinking. All things, all beings are Buddhas themselves, true, independent, and free.*

### An Oak Tree in the Garden

A monk asked Joshu why Bodhidharma came to China. Joshu answered, "The oak tree in the garden."

*Bodhidharma brought Zen to China in the sixth century. Thus the question means, "What is Zen?" Joshu gives a beautiful answer: "The oak tree in the garden."*

**Who Is He?**

Hoen said, "The past and future Buddhas, both are his servants. Who is he?"

*In this koan "he" is not the relative he, as in "he and I." It is the absolute "he." "He" is the master of the historical Gautama Buddha and of the future Maitreya Buddha. "He" is the master of all Buddhas. "He" is the essence of all life. "He" is the ideal Amida Buddha. To find "him" is to find the source of you yourself. Enlightenment means the discovery of this "he." When one discovers this "he" in himself, one is able to see "him" in all beings.*

## Echo's Inquiry About Buddha

One day a young novice said to Patriarch Hogen, "My name is Echo, and I would like to ask Your Reverence what is meant by the name Buddha?" Hogen merely said, "Oh, so you are Echo are you?"

*Echo is no ordinary man, and his question is no ordinary question. It is a profound challenge. What is Buddha? Hogen's answer is apropos. Echo is Echo, the Buddha, what else? The real Echo is the Buddha, the true reality where there is no selfhood.*

**The Four Gates of Joshu**

A monk asked Joshu, "What is Joshu?" Joshu replied, "East gate, West gate, South gate, North gate."

*Joshu's given name was Jushin, but according to Chinese custom, he was called by the name of the place in which he lived: Joshu. Many Zen Masters are known by the names of places where they reside. When the monk asked Joshu, "What is Joshu?" he had a scheme in mind. If, for instance, Joshu had answered, "It is I," the monk might have said, "Well, then, what is this town called?" On the other hand, if Joshu had said, "Joshu is this town," the monk could have demanded, "Then who is this man before me?" But Joshu was not to be tricked. He answered, in effect, "If anyone wants to see me, see what I am, come in—the gates are all open!" Nothing is hidden. The four gates are still open.*



## Funyo's Walking Stick

Funyo pointed to his walking stick and said to his monks, "Whoever understands this walking stick completely, understands the quest for Zen."

*It is customary for a Zen monk to visit several teachers, both to learn from the teacher and to test the depth of their own understanding. For these monks, traveling on foot, the necessary walking stick became a symbol of truth-seeking. Funyo was an exceptionally earnest and learned truth-seeker who visited more than seventy teachers. To visit a teacher is not, however, to receive something but rather an opportunity to dig deep within one's own self. Zen Master Dogen said, "To learn Zen is to learn one's self." To understand Funyo's walking stick is to understand.*

三



## Yakusan Holds Zen

The governor of a state said to Yakusan, "I understand that all Buddhists must possess Sila [precepts], Dhyana [meditation], and Prajna [wisdom]. Do you keep the precepts? Do you practice meditation? Have you attained wisdom?" Yakusan replied, "This poor monk has no such junk around here."

"You must have a profound teaching," the governor said, "but I do not understand it." "If you want to hold it," Yakusan continued, "you must climb the highest mountain and sit on the summit or dive into the deepest sea and walk on the bottom. Since you can not enter even your own bed without a burden on your mind, how can you grasp and hold my Zen?"

*Some people are simply curious—about Zen, Christianity, Yoga. They want to know what someone else has practiced or attained. Such people are bystanders or onlookers. They are not truth-seekers. Yakusan, perhaps, was annoyed by the governor's question; for, in fact, his whole life was the practice and realization of the three attributes. But Yakusan answered in typical Zen style: "no such junk around here." Today's world contains many people who are nervous, anxious, and, like the governor, unable to sleep soundly due to mental burdens. Zen is no idle matter. It is the way to a life of peace and harmony. But if one sincerely wishes to know Zen, one must climb the highest mountain, dive into the deepest sea.*

**Gensha's Blank Paper**

Gensha sent a monk to his old teacher, Seppo, with a letter of greeting. Seppo called his monks together and opened the letter in their presence. The envelope contained three blank sheets of paper. Seppo showed these to the monks and asked, "Do you understand?" Since there was no answer, he continued, as if reading, "When spring comes, the flowers bloom; when fall comes, the fruits ripen." When the messenger monk returned to Gensha and told him all that had happened, Gensha commented, "My old man is in his dotage."

*Gensha, the successor to Seppo, was an illiterate fisherman until he became a monk. Later, he became a great Master, great enough to criticize his own teacher's Zen. When Gensha heard of Seppo's words, his judgment was: "What diluted lukewarm Zen! My message was the irreducible essence of Zen. My old teacher must be getting senile."*

## Yakusan's Lake

Yakusan asked a newly-arrived monk, "Where have you come from?" The monk answered, "From the Southern Lake." "Is the lake full or not?" inquired Yakusan. "Not yet," the monk replied. "There has been so much rain, why isn't the lake filled?" Yakusan asked. The monk remained silent.

*When a new monk arrives at a monastery, the first question asked him is, usually, where have you come from, that is, from whom have you learned Zen? Here the lake is not only a geographical lake; it symbolizes the monk himself, his mind, his understanding. The monk was really quite a simpleton in Zen as his answers reveal. Yakusan cornered him: "There has been so much rain, why isn't the lake filled?" We are showered everyday by the Dharma rain (truth). Why is the lake not filled?*

### The Broken Tray

There was once a small hut called "rich field" where a monk lived for thirty years. He had for his use only one tray, made of clay. One day a student who studied under him accidentally broke that tray. Each day the teacher asked the student to replace it. But each time the disciple brought a new tray the teacher threw it out, saying, "This is not it. Give me back my old one."

*What does the tray represent? Perhaps the monk himself, his pure mind. The disciple brought a new tray many times, but every time the teacher threw it away. The teacher didn't want the tray; he wanted the student to bring back his original pure mind. The student attached to the tray itself, but the old monk inter-uses the tray and the true self freely. There is no tray, as such.*

## Living Alone

A monk asked Ungo, "How can I live alone at the top of the mountain?" Ungo answered, "Why do you give up your Zendo in the valley and climb the mountain?"

*This koan is appropriate both for monks and modern people. How would it be if I isolated myself? There would be no one to bother me; everything would be quiet and serene. Many people wish to escape. Ungo answered, in effect, that the problem is a restless mind, relative thinking. The very Zendo in the valley is the top of the mountain.*

*Many think that heaven or happiness is elsewhere. Many think that learning Zen or self-discipline is the way to a life different from the one they are now living. But to become good is not to take away the bad. Actually, the bad turns into good. Hardship and difficulties are the source of real appreciation in life. The more ice there is, the more water. The more trouble, the greater the appreciation of life. But people still think that place or situation is the cause of trouble. If one carries the same mind and attitude, wherever one goes, there also go the troubles.*

**Unko Sends Some Hakama**

*The poor monk had no trousers to protect his legs from cold. But still he would not accept Unko's gift. He was quite an independent man, maybe even enlightened. Of course, we are all born with our own clothing. That is, everyone has Buddha-nature and needs no external help. But Unko sent a message to test his understanding. What about before you were born? The man could not answer, after all. It is easy to talk about Buddha-nature, enlightenment, and Zen after reading books and hearing lectures. There are enough imitators, followers, bluffers, and those who do not know that they do not know.*

*According to the story, after the monk died and was cremated, sarira were found in the ashes. Sarira are white, beautifully shaped bones, which, according to an old Chinese legend, are found in the remains of those who have Buddha-nature. But Unko was unimpressed. To him, eighty-four bushels of sarira were not comparable to real enlightenment, for only realization of the ultimate truth will bring real serenity, happiness, and freedom in life.*

Unko, the Master of a large monastery, sent some Hakama [loose, warm trousers] to a Taoist monk living alone in a hut near the temple. He had heard that this monk sat long hours in meditation with no covering for his legs. The monk refused the gift, saying, "I was born with my own trousers." Unko sent a message to him, asking, "What did you wear before you were born?" The Taoist could not answer. Later, this monk died, and after his cremation, sarira were found in the ashes. These were brought to Unko, who said, "Even though he had left eighty-four bushels of sarira, they would not be worth the one answer he failed to give me."



## The Iron Boat

When Gensha was studying Zen under Master Seppo, a brother monk named Ko said, "If you can attain something of Zen, I will make an iron boat and sail the high seas." Many years later Gensha became a Zen Master, with Ko studying under him as an attendant monk. One day Gensha said, "Have you built your iron boat?" Ko remained silent.

*Gensha started learning Zen at thirty years of age under Master Seppo. The young brother monk, Ko, made his remark about the iron boat during the Tan dynasty (eighth and ninth centuries) when people in China never dreamed of the metal ships we have today. Although Ko started the study of Zen at an earlier age than Gensha and studied and disciplined hard for many years, he was still far from realization. Many years later when Gensha, as Master, asked Ko about the iron boat, Gensha was not being sarcastic, insinuating, or exacting revenge upon Ko. It was the kindest word that Master Gensha could give Ko to awaken him. Zen is attained neither by years of practice and discipline nor by study and accumulation of knowledge.*

**Unmon's Family Tradition**

A monk asked Unmon, "What is your family tradition?" Unmon answered, "Oh, it looks like students who wish to come to learn are already outside the gate."

*Unmon succeeded Seppo and founded the Unmon school of Zen. He taught many students, and his school developed many special characteristics. But here the monk asked not about techniques and methods, but about Unmon's daily Zen life. Unmon's answer said nothing about Buddhism or Zen. And if the monk had continued his questioning, asking about the students outside the gate, he would still be far off the point. Students who wish to learn are not only outside the gate. They are always at hand. Each of us has deep within a student who wishes to learn. Unmon himself is at the gate of learning. Each of us stands there with him.*

## Joshu's Dwelling Place

One day Joshu visited Unko who said, "Why don't you settle down in your old age?" Joshu asked, "Where is the place for me?" "The ruins of an old temple are here on the mountain," Unko suggested. "Then why don't you live there yourself," Joshu said. Unko did not answer. Later, Joshu visited Shuyu who also asked him, "Why don't you settle down in your old age?" "Where is the place for me," questioned Joshu as before. "Don't you know the place for your old age?" Shuyu countered. Joshu then commented, "I have practiced horseback riding for thirty years, but today I fell from a donkey."

*Joshu started to study Zen at the age of sixty-one. When he was eighty years old, he became the Master of the Kannon Temple at Joshu. He lived to be one hundred twenty years old and was known for his energetic traveling and visiting of monasteries and Masters to challenge their Zen wisdom. He left more koans than any other Master. When Unko suggested that Joshu settle down and stop traveling, Joshu already knew his own true home for he was always there. So his, "Where is the place for me?" is very ironic.*

*As for Unko's suggestion that Joshu settle down in the old ruins, Joshu tells Unko to live there himself. For Joshu there is no retirement in Zen. Zen Masters are always at ease, free to do whatever they want, so there is no need for retirement.*

*When Joshu visited Shuyu, he was asked the same question and gave the same answer. But Shuyu took the ironic answer at face value and said, in effect, "Shame on you. At your age you should know your home is right under your feet." To this Joshu replied that he was used to dealing with horses but not with donkeys. Rinzai is known for his "khats," Tokusan for his stick, and Joshu for his well-seasoned words.*

## Holy Fruits

Unmon once lived in a temple called the "Chapel of Holy Trees." One morning a government official called on him and asked, "Are your holy fruits well ripened now?" "None of them has ever been called green," answered Unmon.

*The government official, whose name was Kiku, was asking about Unmon's maturity in Dharma (Zen) life. Unmon simply answers that the fruits of Dharma have always been ripe and were never green. Dharma fruits are the Buddha-nature, the essence of reality, which is something beyond time and space. They are matured from beginningless time. Their size dwarfs the universe. They are hard as iron balls, and no human teeth can bite them. Only the Dharma teeth can chew and taste the sweet nectar of those holy fruits.*



## Suigan's Eyebrows

○ Suigan, at the end of the summer retreat, said to his disciples, "The whole summer I have lectured you. Look! Has Suigan any eyebrows?" [Have I lost face by talking too much?] Hofuku said, "A robber knows, in his heart, that he is a thief." Chokei said, "Far from dropping off, they have grown longer." But Unmon shouted, "KAN!"

*The essence of Zen can not be explained by words. One has to experience it. Hot and cold are learned only by touch; sweet and sour, only by taste. Explanations are, after all, a waste of time, and Suigan senses that his solicitous kindheartedness led him to excesses. The first monk agrees with him. So does the second, though with sarcasm. Then Unmon warns, "KAN!" ("a roadblock!"). You can not get through by talking. Nirvana must be realized.*

### The One Road of Nirvana

A monk asked Kenpo, "The one road of Nirvana leads into the ten quarters. Where does it begin?" Kenpo raised his walking stick to draw a horizontal line in the air. "Here," he said. The monk later asked Unmon the same question. Unmon held up his fan and said, "This fan leaps up into the thirty-third heaven and hits the presiding deity on the nose, then it dives down into the Eastern Sea and hits the holy carp. The carp becomes a dragon that brings a flood of rain."

*The answers given by Kenpo and Unmon to this koan are quite unsatisfactory. The monk's question is: "The road of enlightenment leads everywhere, but where does it start?" Kenpo answers by drawing a line in the air and Unmon by telling a tall tale about a fan. Why didn't they just say, the road is everywhere. Here! You are standing on the very spot where the road of Nirvana begins. Be yourself; never mind others. The road is not somewhere else; it is under your feet; it is you.*



## Drop of Water

A monk asked Hogen, "What is a drop of water from the source in the valley of the Sixth Patriarch?" Hogen said, "This is a drop of water from the source in the valley of the Sixth Patriarch."

*Zen started in China with Bodhidharma, who came from India about A.D. 520, and it reached its maturity with Huineng, the sixth patriarch from whom Zen teachings flowed. Therefore, the question means "what is the real essence of Zen?" The monk expected profound teachings from the Master, but Hogen simply repeated the question. Often, the answer is already in the question itself. Water is water wherever it is, whoever sees it. Zen is everywhere; everything is Zen. Even the word Zen should be taken off. The real Zen is there, without the label, for Gautama, Bodhidharma, Huineng, and all of us.*

### Jimyo's Summary

*Suigan's answer to his teacher's question was beautiful and well said. But Jimyo, the Master, knew it was only words—a beautiful concept, philosophical and intellectualized. The teacher's anger forced Suigan to face the truth; his Buddhism was based on ideas, not experience. Very humbly, he then asked Jimyo what Buddhism is. Jimyo gave the identical answer, but only the words were the same. The word "apple" is not the true apple. Suigan finally tasted the apple.*

Suigan, thinking he had attained something of Zen, left Jimyo's monastery when he was still a young monk to travel all over China. Years later, when he returned to visit the monastery, his old teacher asked, "Tell me the summary of Buddhism?" Suigan answered, "If a cloud does not hang over the mountain, the moonlight will penetrate the waves of the lake." Jimyo looked at his former pupil in anger and said, "You are getting old; your hair is white and your teeth are sparse, yet you still have such ideas of Zen. How can you escape birth and death?" Suigan bent his head and tears washed his face. After a few minutes, he asked, "Please tell me the summary of Buddhism."

"If a cloud does not hang over the mountain," the teacher replied, "the moonlight will penetrate the waves of the lake." Before the teacher had finished speaking, Suigan was enlightened.

## Everyday Life Is the Way

Joshu asked Nansen, "What is the Way?" Nansen said, "Everyday life is the Way." Joshu asked, "Can it be studied?" Nansen replied, "If you try to study, you will be far away from it." Joshu asked, "If I do not study, how can I know it is the Way?" Nansen said, "The Way does not belong to the perception world, neither does it belong to the nonperception world. Cognition is a delusion and noncognition is senseless. If you want to reach the true Way beyond doubt, place yourself in the same freedom as the sky. You name it neither good nor not-good."

*This is not really a koan; it explains a central idea in Oriental philosophy, particularly in Zen Buddhism. Zen, after all, is finding the Way and walking the Way. The difficult part is that while the Way must be sought, the sought Way is not the true Way. The Way, Nansen explains, does not belong to the scholar who knows about it, nor to the ignoramus who lives it but does not know about it. It is never attained by seeking it relatively. The Way is absolute, beyond the relative world of comparison and explanation. It is life itself. The Way is universal, yet when one lives it, it is uniquely his own.*

## The Real Eye

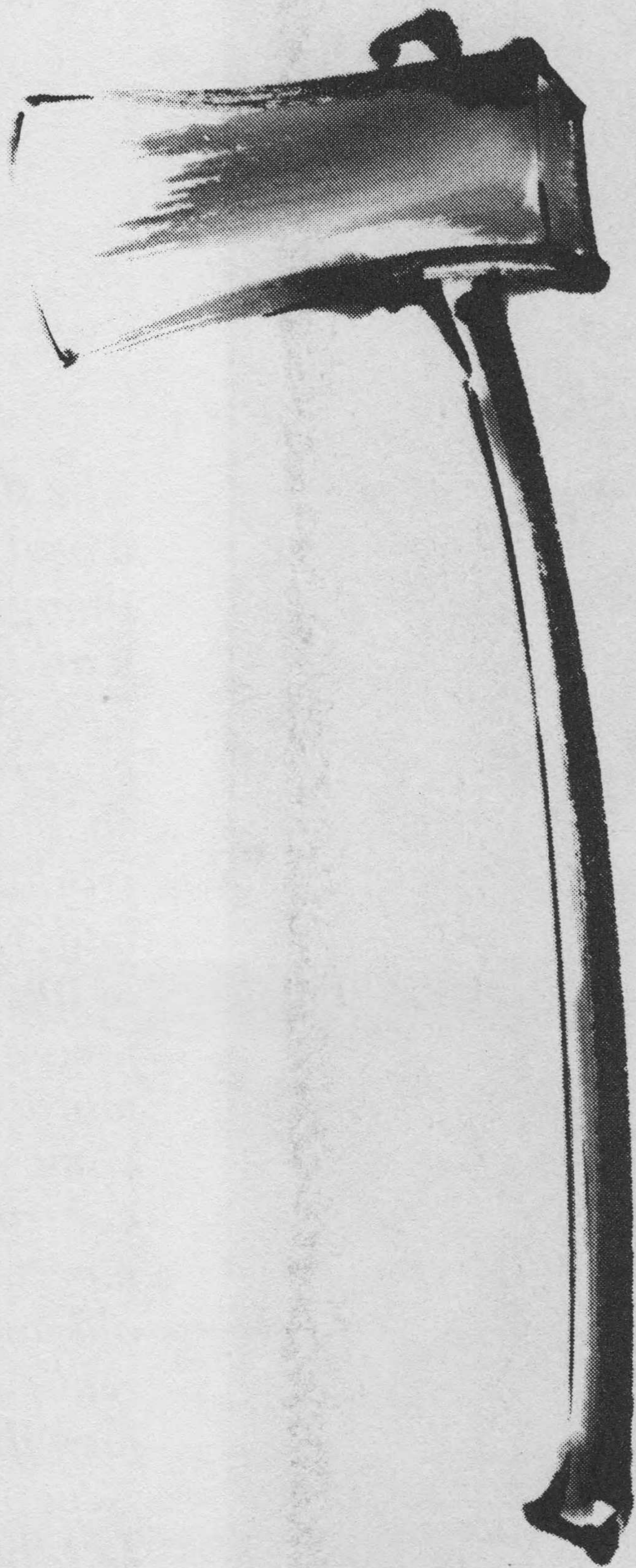
*Avalokitesvara, a Bodhisattva symbolic of compassion, has one thousand hands and one thousand eyes—a thousand eyes to see many people who need help and a thousand hands to help those people. Some Avalokitesvaras have eleven faces so that all directions can be seen simultaneously. Rinzai took Muyoku's question, word for word, then he added, "Now tell me, quick!" Rinzai took Muyoku's question, so Muyoku took Rinzai's seat. Rinzai stood up and asked, "Why?" This "why" is the koan. It is not only Rinzai's "why," it is also Muyoku's. It is the absolute Why. The thousand eyes of Avalokitesvara all are real eyes. We have two eyes; both are real. No one asks which eye is real. Such a question is nonsense.*

Muyoku asked Rinzai, "Avalokitesvara has one thousand hands, and each hand has an eye. Which is the real eye?" Rinzai answered, "Avalokitesvara has one thousand hands, and each hand has an eye. Which is the real eye? Now tell me, quick!" Muyoku pulled Rinzai from his seat, then sat in his place. Rinzai stood up and asked, "Why?" Then he shouted, "Khats!" and pulled Muyoku from his seat in turn. Muyoku left the room quietly.

## Ganto's Ax

One day Tokusan told his student Ganto, "I have two monks who have been here for many years. Go and examine them." Ganto picked up an ax and went to the hut where the two monks were meditating. He raised the ax, saying, "If you say a word I will cut off your heads. If you do not say anything, I will also behead you." Both monks continued their meditation as if he had not spoken. Ganto dropped the ax and said, "You are true Zen students." He returned to Tokusan and related the incident. "I see your side well," Tokusan agreed, "but tell me, how is their side?" "Tozan may admit them," replied Ganto, "but they should not be admitted under Tokusan."

*Ganto is Tokusan's student, and how Ganto investigates the two monks is, in itself, a good test for Ganto. Though Ganto threatened to decapitate the monks, they continued to meditate. He concluded that they were true students. But when questioned by Master Tokusan, Ganto's answer was ironic: Tozan (a kind, gentle Master) may admit them, but Tokusan (well known for his rough blows) would not. If hitting is the way to awaken students, then carts pulling horses are all Buddhas. Ganto challenged his teacher. A Master can be bitten by his own dog. Clearly, there were two schools on how to approach Zen.*



## The Three Worlds

A monk asked Ganto, "When the three worlds threaten me, what shall I do?" Ganto answered, "Sit down." "I do not understand," said the monk. Ganto said, "Pick up the mountain and bring it to me. Then I will tell you."

*The three worlds are the world of desire, the world of thought, and the material world—in short, everything. The question is, when everything threatens, what should one do? The three worlds are neither good or bad, right or wrong. They neither threaten nor are they favorably disposed. The three worlds are just there. Things come and go beyond our control: rain, wind, heat, cold, meeting, separation, growing old, and dying. These are the realities of life and one must face them, regardless.*

*Acceptance is transcendence. Let the three worlds come and let the three worlds go. Recognize the impossible, such as picking up a mountain, and just be yourself.*

## The Ultimate Teaching

*Seppo was Tokusan's successor, but this dialogue took place when Seppo was still a young student. Like many others, he thought that Nirvana was something and that the ultimate teaching was something, too. There is no "ultimate" something. So Tokusan gave him a blow. Still, Seppo did not understand. He asked again the next day. Tokusan said, "Zen has no words." Bodhidharma once said, "I do not know." Eka, the second patriarch, said, "can not get it." Zen is living life. If one conceptualizes, it dies. The ultimate is continuum. When Ganto, another student, heard of this dialogue, he said that Tokusan spoiled Zen with explanations. Indeed, this very comment spoils Zen with too many words. Zen must be sought and realized by individuals. Is this koan easily understood? If so, it is only the intellect.*

Seppo asked Tokusan, "Can I also share the ultimate teaching the old patriarchs attained?" Tokusan hit him with a stick, saying, "What are you talking about?" Seppo did not understand, so he repeated his question the next day. Tokusan answered, "Zen has no words, neither does it have anything to give." Ganto heard about this exchange and commented, "Tokusan has an iron backbone, but he spoils Zen with his soft words."



## The Greatest Depth

Dogo was sitting on the high seat of meditation when a monk came and asked, "What is the greatest depth of the teaching?" Dogo came down from the seat, kneeled on the floor, and said to the monk, "You are here after traveling far, but I am sorry to have nothing to offer you."

*The monk's question was, "What is the deepest thing in Buddhist teachings and the deepest point in your enlightenment?" This attachment must be destroyed. The world of Dharma can not be measured by shallowness or deepness. It is beyond deep or shallow, right or wrong, good or bad.*

*Zen discipline is often similar to training in kendo, judo, and other martial arts.*

*Teacher and students practice and train mutually. The monk who came and stood by Gyosan intended to challenge the teacher. But Gyosan was aware of those tricks. He immediately drew a circle with the character "water" beneath it and looked at the monk as if to say, "Well, do you understand?" Poor monk. Does it mean bring a pail with water in it? If he tries to solve the circle and the water logically, he can never enter the mind of Gyosan. Naturally he could not say a word. He came to challenge Gyosan, but the situation was completely reversed. Gyosan wrote the ideograph for water. But no matter how many characters for water are written, they can not quench thirst. Gyosan drew a large circle to indicate the perfect reality, the complete universe. But to the monk it was just like a picture of bread; it could never fill his stomach. The truth of life can not be understood, no matter how skillfully explained and presented, unless one is ready to receive it. It might have been better for this monk to have received a blow or a "khats!" rather than a symbolic koan.*

### **Gyosan Sits in Meditation**

One day when Gyosan was sitting in meditation, a monk came and stood by him. Gyosan recognized the monk, and he drew a circle on the ground with the ideograph for water beneath it. Then he looked questioningly at the monk. The monk could not answer.

## Unmon's Feast in the Joss House

One day, while lecturing his monks, Unmon asked, "Do you want to meet the old patriarchs?" Before anyone could answer, he pointed his stick above their heads and said, "The old patriarchs are jumping on your heads." Then he asked, "Do you wish to look them in the eye?" He pointed to the ground and said, "They are all under your feet." After a moment, he spoke, as though to himself, saying "I made a feast in the joss house, but the hungry gods are never satisfied."

*In China a joss house was a memorial chapel where incense was burned and offerings of food were made for the spirits of the dead. Unmon was a great Master, founder of the Unmon school, and he instructed more than ninety Zen Masters. He was known for his wisdom and oratory. Here, he advises that if you want to know the essence of Zen, as taught by the patriarchs, do not search in India, or in olden times: look here, on top of your head. Enlightenment, Nirvana, is right under your feet. Unmon taught so much that he made a feast (in the joss house), but "the hungry gods are never satisfied," for they did not eat the food. We are the hungry gods, looking for Nirvana when we are already in it.*

## Tozan's Tripitaka

Master Tozan said, "The entire Tripitaka can be expressed in one character." Another Master, Hakuun, elaborated Tozan's statement with a poem:

Each stroke is clear though  
hard to read,  
Gautama failed to write it  
many times.  
So why not give the task to  
Mr. Wang?  
Perhaps he'll do it, after  
all.

*Tripitaka is a Sanskrit word meaning "three baskets," which refers to the complete texts of the original Buddhist writings. The three baskets are Sutra (words of the Buddha), Vinaya (rules and regulations governing monks), and Abhidharma (commentaries and treatises on the teachings). It is an adage, here repeated by Tozan, that the entire teachings can be expressed in one word. But truth, simple and concrete, is ever-changing according to the specific condition and specific time. That which does not change is concept, and concepts are not living truths; they are lifeless statements, static thoughts. Thus, no matter how masterful the calligraphy, even if rendered by the famous artist Mr. Wang, the truth can not be written, read, or spoken—only lived.*

### Hyakurei's Attainment

Hyakurei the monk and Houn the layman were studying under Baso (successor to Nangaku). One day as they met in the monastery corridor, Hyakurei remarked, "Our Grandfather in Zen said, 'If one asserts that it is something, one misses it altogether.' I wonder if he ever showed it to anyone?" Houn answered, "Yes, he did." "To whom?" asked Hyakurei. Houn then pointed to himself and said, "To this fellow." "Your attainment," said Hyakurei, "is so beautiful and profound that even Manjusri, the wise, and Subhuti, the compassionate one, could not adequately praise it." At this Houn said, "Well, I wonder if there is anyone who saw what our Grandfather meant?" The monk did not reply; he merely put on his straw hat and walked away. "Watch your step," the layman called after him. But Hyakurei walked on without turning his head.

*Hyakurei and Houn were forever testing one another's understanding of Zen. In this koan they are discussing the Zen idea of Sunyata (Emptiness, or the Void) expressed by Nangaku, the "Grandfather of Zen," who attained enlightenment when he understood, "If one asserts that it is something, one misses it altogether." That is to say, everything is constantly changing; nothing is permanent. By the time one asserts that something is so, the reality is changed and it is no longer so. Yesterday's truth is not truth today. The truth of a moment ago is not true now. In this exchange Hyakurei asked Houn if anyone had ever experienced what Nangaku talked about. Houn said yes; he himself had experienced it, that is, had become enlightened. Hyakurei then ridiculed Houn by lavishly praising his "attainment." Houn finally asked for Hyakurei's understanding, which the monk expressed by walking away wordlessly. But did either of them really understand Zen?*

**Sozan's Four Don'ts**

*All Buddha's teachings are aimed at cutting off the root of human illusions and overcoming human troubles. However, the minute we learn something we tend to become attached to it. For this reason Sozan prescribed four antidotes. The first is not to follow the bird's road of mind. The bird flies freely in the sky, and there is no set road to fly. But even such a way of selflessness can become attachment. Second, do not clothe yourself before you are born—do not attach even to non-attachment. Third, do not say the present minute is eternal because all things are in constant change, are continuously becoming. Every minute is real, but it is passing, and you can not hold it or say it is eternal. And, lastly, the truth is beyond time and space, and even the time before birth is within time if it is once conceptualized. Whatever becomes conceptualized loses life. It is like a live fish swimming in the water. If you catch it and take it out, the fish will die. A caught fish is a dead fish. So Sozan warns, whatever it is, no matter how good, how beautiful, or how true, do not try to catch and possess it.*

Sozan said:

Do not follow the bird's road  
of mind;  
Do not clothe yourself before  
you are born;  
Do not say the present minute  
is eternal;  
Do not express yourself before  
birth.

## Taking Up the Staff at Lotus Mountain

At Lotus Mountain the hermit Rengeho held up his staff one day and addressed the crowds who had come to see him:

“Why is it so many can not live the hermit’s life?” Since no one answered, he himself replied, “Because they do not have strength enough for the Way.” Then he asked the crowd, “Well, isn’t that right?” Again he replied, “Carrying my staff, I will ignore people. I will just depart for the thousand, the ten thousand peaks.”

*A Buddhist monk always carried a staff. In India the staff was an absolute necessity to measure the depth of streams before crossing and to protect the monk from snakes and other animals during his travels. However, when Buddhism arrived in China, the staff was not essential for Chinese monks, and so the staff began to take on other meanings. We read of staffs swallowing the universe and spitting out the world, staffs killing and giving life. The staff became a symbol of supreme enlightenment.*

*Rengeho lived a simple hermit’s life at Lotus Mountain. He held up his staff for twenty years, but no one really answered. Lotus Mountain is the mountain of enlightenment. The peaks he speaks of are the peaks of serenity, beauty, freedom, joy, honor, confidence, satisfaction, and many others. He wants to show Lotus Mountain and its many beautiful peaks to everyone—but people do not understand.*

## Calling Card

Kitagaki, the governor of Kyoto, called upon the great Zen Master of Tofukuji Temple, Master Keichu. He gave the attendant monk his calling card to present to Keichu. The card read: "Kitagaki, Governor of Kyoto." Keichu looked at the card and said, "I have no business with such a fellow. Tell him to get out of here!" The attendant carried the card back with an apology. "No, that was my error," the governor said. He took the card, scratched out the words "Governor of Kyoto," and said, "Please take this back and ask your teacher again." When Keichu saw the card he said, "Oh, is that Kitagaki? I want to see that fellow."

*In the world of Dharma there is no rank, no sex, no race. A Zen Master has no interest in whether one is a king, emperor, governor, farmer, or beggar. He is interested only in those who seek the truth.*



## Transmigration

Kenpo asked his monks,  
“What kind of eyes do they  
have who transmigrate to the  
six worlds?”

*It is told that those who are not enlightened will transmigrate to the six worlds: the world of hell (suffering), the world of hungry demons (greed), the world of animals (ignorance), the world of bloodshed (killing), the world of man (moral rectitude, happiness, and sorrow) and the world of angels (happiness only). The seventh world is the Buddha's world. When one attains the Buddha's world, one need not transmigrate (suffer) further. Kenpo asked his monks what kind of eyes do they have, those who go again and again into the six worlds.*

*To begin with, those who live in the six worlds do not have eyes to see. Their blind ignorance is the very reason they live in such greed and suffering. Zen teaches reality beyond reason, reality itself.*

*Things simply are, and there is no good or bad reason. Each world has its own eyes. The world of bloodshed has the eyes of aggression, and the animal world has the eyes of ignorance. The farmer's eye is to cultivate, and the businessman's eye is to buy and sell. But those eyes are hindrances and should be forgotten. True love forgets the idea of "love." Fire is hot; ice is cold. Samsara is Nirvana; Nirvana is Samsara ("there is no enlightenment outside of worldly life"). The eye of Zen is to see things as they are: no love, no hate, no enemy, no ally.*

## A Walk in the Hills

One day when the novice Hofuku and the monk Chokei were walking in the hills, the novice pointed to a hilltop saying, "Surely that is the top of Mount Myoho!" Chokei replied, "True enough, but what a pity you need mention it." Later Hofuku related this conversation to a fellow monk, Kyosei. Kyosei commented, "If it were not for the likes of Chokei, there would be rattle-brains everywhere." Setcho commented on all of this: "Today, walking in the hills with these fellows, what do they really understand? A hundred years from now I don't say there will be none who understand, but those who do will be few and far between."

*Hofuku, Chokei, and Kyosei were all disciples of Seppo. In this koan Hofuku is a novice and the youngest. Chokei is a few years older and more advanced in understanding, and Kyosei is far advanced in Zen. Mount Myoho is symbolic of the supreme realization of the absolute and appears in the Avatamsaka Sutra. The young novice is very childish and is showing off, true to human nature, his attainment before his brother disciple, Chokei. Chokei, in elder-brother fashion, puts Hofuku in his place. Later Hofuku appeals to Kyosei, expecting a more sympathetic response. But Kyosei only comments that it was, indeed, fortunate to have a good companion like Chokei who speaks the truth.*

*Although the top of Mount Myoho is the symbol of supreme enlightenment, Hofuku must have studied the Avatamsaka Sutra superficially because he understood it to mean supreme enjoyment of enlightenment. While walking with Chokei, he exclaimed "That is the top of*



*Mount Myoho!" just as someone who, after a hard day's work, might exclaim from a warm bath, "Oh! this is heaven." To understand Zen and enlightenment merely on the surface is indeed a great pity.*

### The Old Cow, Tetsuma

Tetsuma, an old woman, visited Isan one day. Isan greeted her: "Welcome, Old Cow!" Tetsuma said, "In a few days there will be a ceremony celebrating the restoration of Buddhism to imperial favor. Is Your Reverence going to attend?" In reply, Isan flung himself, sprawling, on the floor. Tetsuma left.

*Tetsuma was a nun. Her surname was Ryu. She was unusually able, intelligent, and sharp. Those foolhardy enough to challenge her Zen were crushed; hence she was given the name, Tetsuma, which means "iron grinding mill." Isan called her by her nickname, Old Cow, meaning "old female buffalo." It was a name of camaraderie, not derision. In those times the buffalo was a precious animal. When living, it provided humankind with labor, milk, and fertilizer; when dead, it provided hide for leather. Isan always commented that, if reborn, he would like to be reborn as a buffalo.*

*This koan demonstrates the freedom and spontaneity of enlightened ones. Tetsuma and Isan are understanding, frank, and intimate. There is no formality. Isan does not hesitate to express exactly what he thinks of such ceremonies as celebrating official sanction of Buddhism. Their friendship is completely without pretence or artificiality. The enlightened world is free and natural;*

*there is no feeling of must,  
ought, or should. Everything  
is said and done  
spontaneously as it arises. But  
one who thinks he has  
attained enlightenment yet  
still feels, "I am enlightened,"  
is not enlightened. True Zen  
has no smell of Zen.*

## Measuring the Water

One day Joshu visited Shuyu's lecture hall. He ascended the platform with his staff and looked from east to west, then from west to east. "What are you doing?" Shuyu asked. "I am measuring the water," Joshu answered. "There is no water, not even a drop. How can you measure it?" Shuyu answered. Joshu leaned his staff against the wall and left.

*Joshu went to his fellow monk, Shuyu, to test his understanding. He was measuring the depth of Shuyu's mind. Shuyu's retort was good. However, he showed himself to be still in the world of "is" and "is not": "There is no water." Joshu departed as freely as he came, unencumbered even by his staff.*

## The Exact Moment for Hatching

A young monk came to Master Kyosei and said, "This disciple is pecking on the inside of the shell, ready to hatch. I beg you, sir, help me by knocking on the outside of the shell." Kyosei said, "If I do, will you attain life?" The monk said, "If I don't, that will be your shortcoming, and you will become the laughingstock of the world." To this Kyosei replied, "Conceited fool!"

*This koan is both interesting and important. Every Zen Master has his own way of teaching. The teacher must know the student's disposition, degree of progress, and when he is at the crucial point. A teacher may easily crush a student by wrong application of teaching or by wrong timing, and that person will never rise again. However, the ego self must be killed in order for one to live a new life of true reality. For this reason it is said that a Zen Master has a double-edged sword—one that both kills and gives life. This sword must be used very exactly.*

*The monk in this koan thinks he is ready for enlightenment and asks his teacher to give the last push. But Kyosei knows exactly where this student stands. The very fact of self-conceit is a sign of unreadiness. Even if this monk were enlightened, he would attach to enlightenment and still not be free; he might even mislead others. Kyosei knows when to knock on the shell.*



## The No-Monument Monument

The Emperor Shukusho went to visit his Zen teacher, Chu, who was very ill, and said, "After your demise, and may that not be for a hundred years, what kind of memorial would you like?" Chu answered, "A plain, un-tiered monument." The emperor continued, "What shape?" Chu remained silent for a long time, then said to the emperor, "Do you understand?" "No," said the emperor. "Well," said Chu, "after I pass, send for my successor, Tangen, and ask him what I meant." In time, Chu passed away, and the emperor sent for Tangen and asked him what Master Chu had meant. Tangen answered the emperor in this way: "South of Sho, north of Tan. Within that region is gold that fills the land. A public ferry boat sails right by the place; some see it, some do not. But in the emperor's palace all are blind."

*Chu in this koan is Echu Kokushi, the National Teacher, advisor to both the country and the emperor in religious matters. Before being invited by Emperor Shukusho (of the Tan dynasty) to become National Teacher, Chu stayed at Hokugaisan Mountain Temple for forty years without once coming out of the gate. After Chu died, the emperor did call Tangen to explain to him what his teacher had meant. Tangen replied with a poem that can not be understood by the intellect. It is beyond words; it is absolute, formless, shapeless, and some see it and some do not.*

*"A plain, un-tiered monument" is written in Chinese characters as "Muho to." "Muho" means a dress that has no sewed place, no seams. But not-sewed dress is impossible. "To" means monument. It is a no-monument monument. This monument is everywhere: "South of Sho, north of Tan." The place is filled with gold, and anyone can go there because the public ferry sails there. The truth of life is everywhere; everybody can see it, everybody can reach it, even though it is as precious as gold. That is the real Zen teaching of Chu.*

## Ten-foot Square

Isan had a poem on the wall of his room that read:

Ten cubic feet  
Too steep to climb,  
Who scales these walls  
Becomes a lord.

Referring to the poem, Unppo said, "Isan is a born Zen Master." A monk asked Unppo, "What poem are you going to write for your room?" Unppo replied:

The ten square feet of Suigan  
Never had a door,  
And any monk who enters it  
Sees Suigan appear!

The monk made a gesture of homage and stood up. Unppo said, "Well, did you see Master Suigan or not?" For a moment the monk hesitated, and Unppo hit him across the mouth with a mosquito brush.

*A Zen Master's room is called hojo, which means "ten-foot square." The dimensions are not necessarily ten square feet, but the tradition arose with Vimalakirti, the most outstanding lay Buddhist during the lifetime of the Gautama Buddha. As the story goes, Vimalakirti lived in a ten-foot square room. His wisdom was so supreme that even the Buddha's monk-disciples respected it. And Vimalakirti's ten-foot room could accommodate countless numbers, for it was the Dharma Room.*

*In this koan Isan's hojo is hard to enter. Anyone who gains entry is like a supreme ruler, for the essence of all things will be known. Suigan's hojo is just the opposite. There is no door; it is easy to get in. But what does one see there? To be in the hojo is not the same as being in the Master's room, The Dharma Room. Realty is hard to enter, as the monk found out.*

## How Trees and Grass Become Enlightened

One day a fifty-year-old student asked Shinkan, "Tendai claims that even grass and trees will become enlightened. How is that possible?" Shinkan said, "Of what use is it to discuss how grass and trees become enlightened? The question is how you yourself can become so." "I never thought of it that way," replied the old student.

*Shinkan lived during the Kamakura period in Japan, and he studied Tendai for six years, then he studied Zen for ten years. After that, he went to China and contemplated Zen for thirteen years. When he returned to Japan, many wished to interview him, but he received few visitors and seldom answered their questions.*

*The questioner in this koan exhibits a great fault of the intellectual: studying and discussing something unrelated to himself. Zen always points within. It is very interesting that when one is enlightened, the grass and trees are enlightened also! The enlightenment of grass and trees is really the enlightenment of ourselves about trees and grass.*

### The True Path

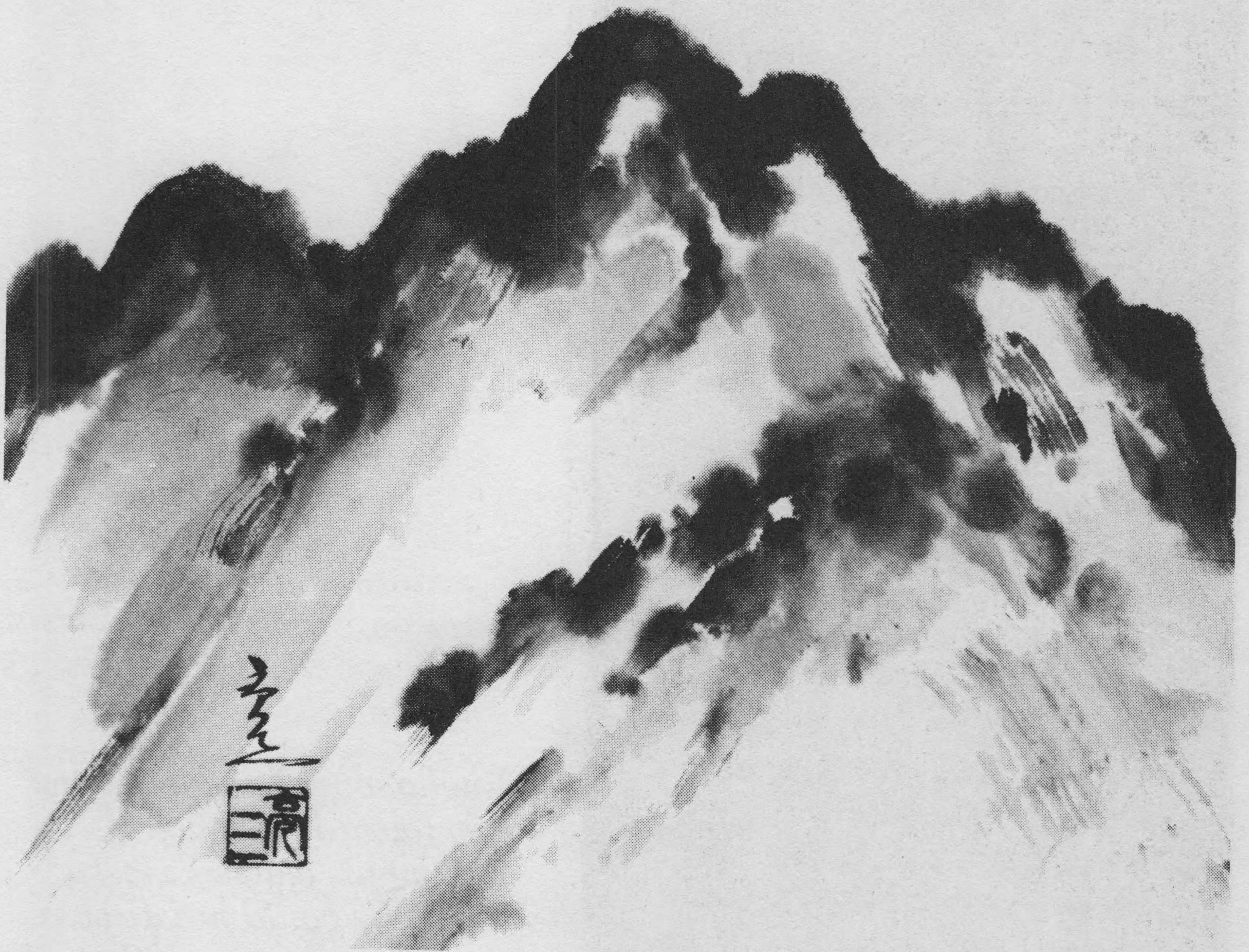
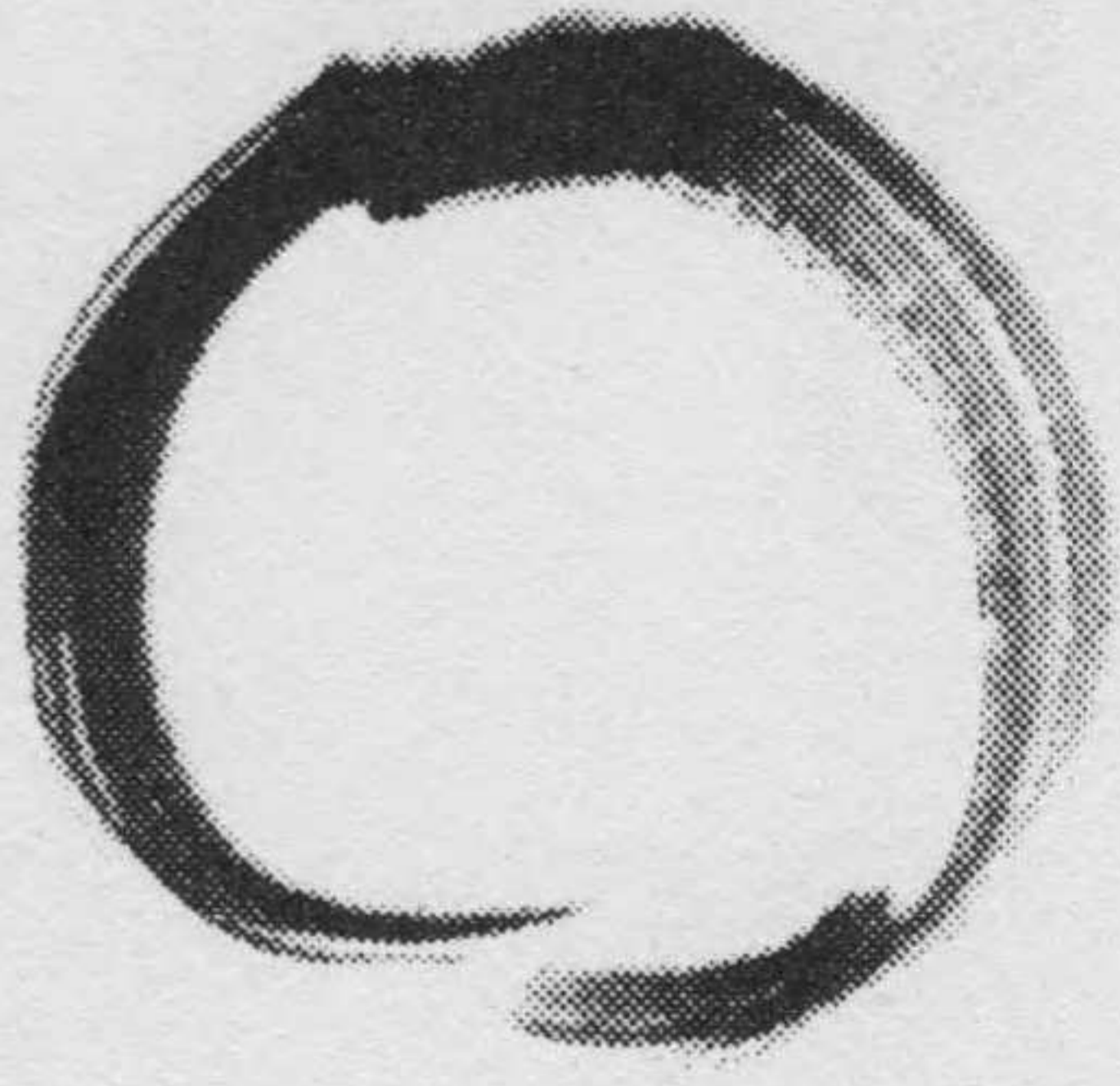
Just before Ninakawa died, Zen Master Ikkyu visited him. "Shall I lead you on?" Ikkyu said. Ninakawa replied, "I came here alone and I go alone. What help could you be to me?" Ikkyu answered, "If you think you really come and go, that is your delusion. Let me show you the path on which there is no coming and going." With those words, Ikkyu had revealed the path so clearly that Ninakawa smiled and passed away.

*Ikkyu was a very famous Zen teacher during the Ashikaga era in Japan. He was the son of an emperor, and his mother was a student of Zen. In this koan he points to the eternal life of Zen, which has no beginning and no end. Since it is eternal, there is no coming and no going. Life and death are only the manifestations of eternal life. Life never dies. We say that we came from eternity and go back to eternity. Eternity means here and now. From beginningless time to endless time, it is all here. Every minute is the manifestation of eternity. Some people worry about death. Why? Death is as natural as birth.*

### Sitting Alone on Mount Taiyu

A monk asked Hyakujo, "What is the most wonderful thing in life?" Hyakujo replied, "Sitting alone on the great Taiyu mountain." As the monk bowed, Hyakujo struck him.

*Hyakujo was the successor of Baso and a most outstanding teacher. The emperor later gave him a special name: Daichi, meaning "great wisdom." The question the monk asks is the same as "what is the essence of Buddhism?" Hyakujo says it is to sit alone on the mount of supreme enlightenment (Mount Taiyu). Alone does not mean away from others. This alone-ness is not disturbed even in the midst of the turmoil of worldly life. If one attains the essence of Zen, even in a busy office one can have the same feeling and taste of life as Hyakujo on his Mount Taiyu. When the monk bowed, Hyakujo hit him as if to say, "Why bow like that to me? Get busy; wake up. You, too, should sit on the top of Mount Taiyu."*



## A Smile in His Lifetime

Mokugen was never known to smile until his last day on earth. When his time came, he called his students and said, "You have studied with me for more than ten years. Show me your real interpretation of Zen. Whomever expresses this most clearly shall be my successor and receive my robe and bowl." Everyone watched Mokugen's severe face, but no one answered. Encho, a disciple of long standing, moved near the bedside and pushed Mokugen's medicine cup forward a few inches toward the bed. The teacher's face became even more severe. "Is that all you understand?" he demanded. Encho moved the cup back to its original place on the bedside table. A beautiful smile appeared on Mokugen's face. "You rascal," he said to Encho, "you have worked with me for ten years and have not yet seen my whole body. Take the robe and bowl. They belong to you."

*Encho moved the medicine cup toward his teacher. Facing his teacher's last hours, he could not discuss the interpretation of Zen. He simply wanted his teacher to stay and live. "Is that all you understand?" the teacher asked. So Encho took back the cup: "If you insist, I will take back the medicine. Even though you pass away, please don't worry. I will take care of the temple." Mokugen smiled, for there was an assured feeling about his successor.*

**Basho Does Not Teach**

*This koan shows the different methods of Zen teaching. The monk asked Basho an impossible question; for how can there be a person who is neither deluded nor enlightened? Basho uses a gentle and gradual method and is sensitive to the time and situation. He is like a knowing physician who diagnoses the illness and prescribes the proper medicine for cure. Tendo's methods are rough and abrupt, like shock treatment. He would take the ox away from the plower and the food from a hungry man. He does not consider the relative value of good or bad, right or wrong, but attacks from the absolute point of view. His forceful way is very conspicuous and dramatic, and people tend to view it as heroic. Basho's way is not flamboyant, but it is a sure way of teaching nevertheless. Both ways need well-developed discipline, deep intuitive wisdom, and noble character on the Master's part.*

A monk asked Basho, "If there is a person who does not avoid birth and death and does not realize Nirvana, do you teach such a person?" Basho answered, "I do not teach him." The monk asked, "Why?" Basho replied, "This old monk knows good and bad."

This dialogue was reported in another monastery, and one day Tendo said, "Basho may know good and bad, but he can not take away a farmer's ox or a hungry man's food. If that monk asked me such a question, before he had half finished, I would hit him. Why? Because from the beginning I do not care about good and bad."



## Not Afraid to Die

A young physician named Kusuda heard that if one studies Zen, he will not be afraid to die. One day he concealed a dagger in his clothing and visited Zen Master Nanin, intending to see if the Master was afraid to die. When Nanin saw Kusuda, he immediately said, "Hello, friend, how are you? We haven't seen each other for a long, long time." Perplexed, Kusuda replied, "We have never met before." "That's right. I mistook you for another physician," Nanin said. With such a beginning, Kusuda lost the chance of surprising him, so he reluctantly asked for Zen instruction. Nanin said, "If you are a physician, treat your patients well. That is Zen." Four times Nanin gave him the same teaching. Kusuda complained that he would not come anymore if he received the same teaching.

So Master Nanin said, "I will give you a koan." And he gave him "Joshu's Mu." Kusuda pondered and meditated and worked on it for two years. But Master Nanin kept saying, "You are not in yet." Another year and a half went by. Kusuda's mind became clear, and Mu became truth.

*Kusuda is like a typical modern young man—curious, skeptical, pragmatic. He went to test the Master's fear of death and wound up studying Zen for years. Only when Kusuda's mind became clear and he understood Mu as Mu, was he no longer concerned with fear of death.*

**Meditating Long, Becoming Weary**

A monk asked Kyorin, "What was the purpose in Bodhidharma's coming West?" Kyorin said, "To meditate a long time and become weary."

*There are one hundred thirty-some koans about the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming to China. This subject has been endlessly discussed, so much, in fact, that it has taken on a special meaning and significance. That is why Kyorin answered as he did. Bodhidharma came because he wanted to come. Bodhidharma meditated for nine years facing a wall; he lived his life sincerely and steadfastly, as the sun shines in the sky. Zen is nothing unusual; it is true to the reality of life. If one wishes to accomplish anything in life, one must have great energy and make great efforts. Why discuss Bodhidharma's coming to China? It would be better to sit down and meditate as Bodhidharma did.*

## The Last Poem of Hoshin

One day Master Hoshin predicted his own death in seven days. On the seventh day he called his disciples together and said, "It is customary to write a farewell poem, but since I am neither poet nor calligrapher, one of you please write my last poem." Then he dictated, "I came from brilliancy and return to brilliancy. What is this?" The monk who was writing these words said, "Master, the poem is one line short." Hoshin shouted, "Khats!" and was dead.

*Hoshin went to China where he studied Zen for many years. After he returned to Japan, he taught in the northeastern region. Prior to the incident described in the koan, he related the following story to his disciples, a story he had heard in China: "One year, on December 25, the Zen monk Tofuku, who was very old, said to his disciples, 'Next year I am not going to be with you, so you people should treat me well this year.' The students thought it was a joke, but they treated the kind old teacher well anyway. On New Year's eve of the next year Tofuku said, 'I am leaving tomorrow when the snow stops.' The disciples laughed and thought he was becoming slightly senile. But at midnight, it started to snow. The next morning they could not find the Master. They finally went to the meditation hall. There, Tofuku had passed away." In relating this story Hoshin commented that a Zen Master can, although it is not necessary, predict his own death, as he now was doing.*

*The last words Hoshin left express the Buddhist concept of future life. He came from brilliancy and returns to brilliancy. Life is eternal. We came from the eternal life, and we will return to the eternal life. We are living the eternal life now, but due to our ignorance we do not know it.*

## The Six Ungraspables

A monk asked Unmon, "What is the Dharma Kaya [the formless, spaceless, timeless, colorless absolute]?" Unmon answered, "The six ungraspables."

*This koan is typical of Unmon. It is short, simple, and extremely difficult. The Dharma Kaya is the absolute—above time, space, and form. The graspables are the six gates of human understanding: the five senses plus mind. But Unmon says the absolute is something that can not be put into these six channels. It is all inclusive, beyond sense and intellect. It is all and everything but can not be said as such.*

## **VI**

# **No Imitations**

Zen life is life without imitation. However small, unimportant, or even inferior your life may be, it is your own. Life is creative if lived with integrity. Everyone is, and must be, an artist of life. However admirable one may appear to others, however successful, unless one is true to one's self, deep satisfaction will never be experienced. Find yourself and be yourself is the motto of Zen and the essence of Buddhism. "What are you? Look within."

### Gutei's One Finger Zen

Zen Master Gutei raised his index finger whenever he was asked a question about Zen. A young novice began to imitate him in this way. When Gutei was told about the novice's imitation, he sent for him and asked him if it were true. The novice admitted it was so. Gutei asked him if he understood. In reply the novice held up his index finger. Gutei promptly cut it off. The novice ran from the room, howling in pain. As he reached the threshold, Gutei called, "Boy!" When the novice turned, Gutei raised his index finger. At that instant the novice was enlightened.

*However good an imitation is, it is still an imitation and not the genuine thing. Raising a finger is not Zen. What that finger stands for is the important thing. Like the novice, we often see the surface, or form, and fail to see the truth. The novice depended on one finger. When it was gone, there was no finger to show Zen. As long as one depends on something, he never becomes free and independent. Enlightenment is to take away all dependencies and attachments and attain a new perspective, a new life.*

**“You Are Sidetracked”**

A Zen student told Unmon, “Brilliance of Buddha illuminates the whole universe.” Before he finished the phrase, Unmon asked, “You are reciting another’s poem, are you not?” “Yes,” answered the student. “You are sidetracked,” said Unmon. Afterward, another teacher, Shishin, asked his pupils, “At what point did that student go off the track?”

*When one speaks honestly and sincerely, one should take the responsibility for one’s words. Many people say “they say” or “men are” or “people talk.” Instead, why doesn’t one say “I am” or “I say”? Zen, like life, is always immediate and direct. Zen rejects the roundabout way because there is no surplus, no life to waste, no life to trifle with.*

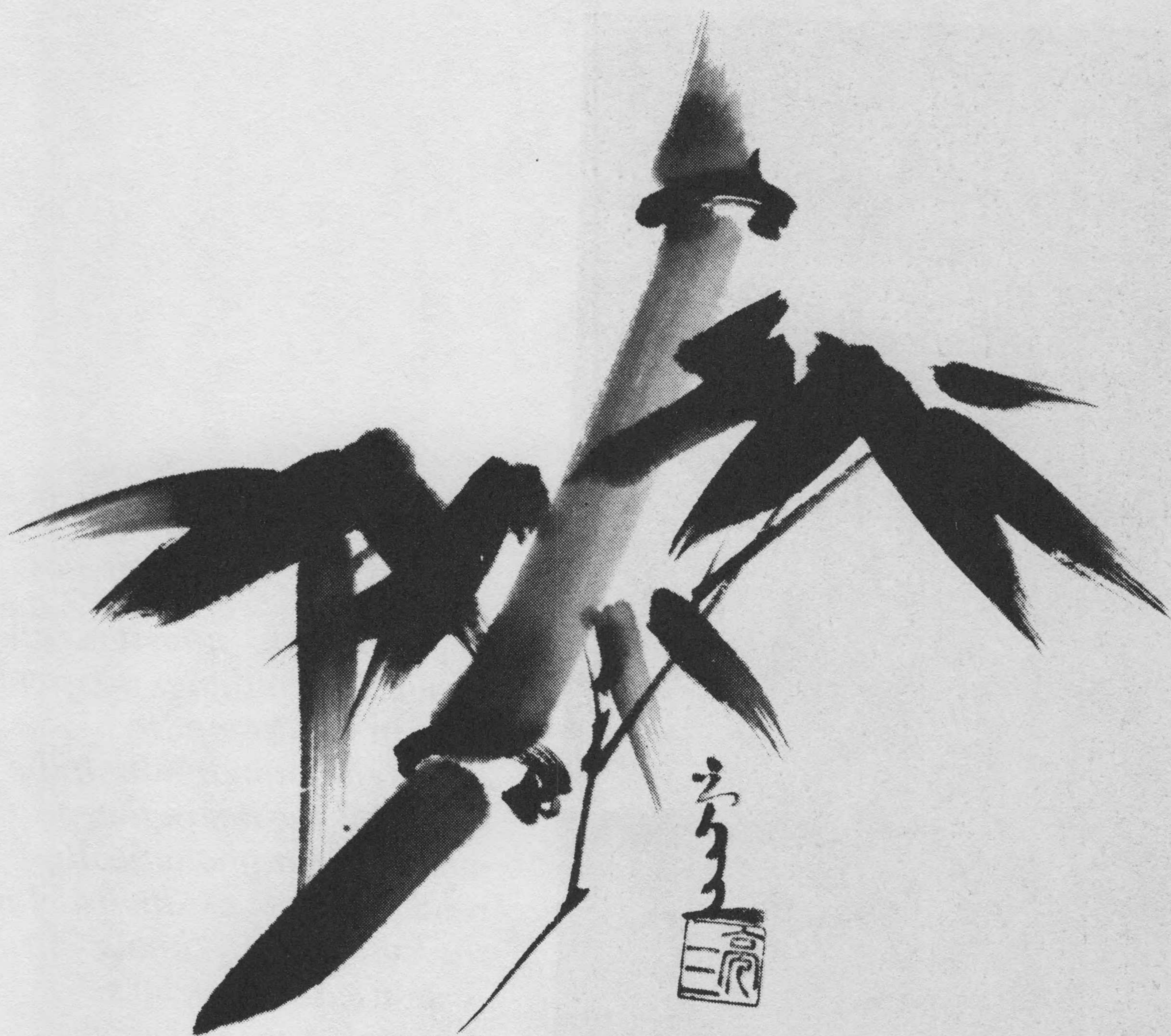


## Hakuun's Black and White

Hakuun, a Chinese Zen Master of the Sung dynasty, wrote a poem:

Where others dwell,  
I do not dwell,  
I do not go,  
Where others go.  
I do not shun  
Humankind,  
But Black and White  
Must be defined.

*Hakuun must have been a unique, creative and artistic person. He wanted only to be himself. The Gautama Buddha said, "Above the heaven and below the heaven, I alone am noble." So each one of us is the noblest in the universe. All are one and equal, yet each is free and independent. That is the way of Hakuun. Black is black and white is white; they can not be compared. Each is absolute.*



## Bokushu and the Empty-Headed Fool

Bokushu asked a monk, "Where have you recently come from?" The monk uttered, "Khats!" Bokushu said, "All right, I have now been treated to your mystic cry." Again the monk uttered, "Khats!" Bokushu said, "Three mystic cries, four mystic cries, what next?" The monk said nothing, so Bokushu gave him a clout with his hand and said, "You empty-headed fool!"

*In Zen mondo (questions and answers) two things are freely used in an attempt to "awaken" an individual: the stick and the deep, sharp mystic shout phonetically rendered here as "khats!" For the monk to cry "khats!" in response to Bokushu's question was to issue a challenge to Bokushu's Zen. Bokushu, a Master, wanted to know, after three, four, or a thousand mystic cries, then what? The poor monk started like a lion but ended like a mouse. He had used the technique of his teacher, Rinzai, well known for his "khats!" but it was not his own "khats!" after all. After the second cry, the monk acknowledged defeat; he did not pretend. He may become a good disciple.*

## Joshu Plans a Visit

Joshu was planning a pilgrimage to a mountain temple when an elder monk, Daitoku, wrote a poem and gave it to him:

Every place a holy place—  
Why travel to the mountain?  
If, to the Enlightened Eye,  
The fabled golden lion in the  
sky

Appeared, it would seem  
commonplace.

“What,” Joshu asked, “is the Enlightened Eye?” The monk made no reply.

*Both Joshu and Daitoku present good points. Joshu's planned visit was to famous Mount Tendai where Manjusri, symbol of wisdom and often depicted astride a lion, is enshrined. Daitoku's poem was a Zen challenge: every place is a good place for meditation; the very spot where you are is the golden spot, so why go to Mount Tendai? Do you think Manjusri is there? Manjusri is everywhere. And even if you should see an omen in the clouds, one who has the Enlightened Eye doesn't put any store in such things. Joshu counterattacked. “What,” he asked, “is the Enlightened Eye?” Maybe Daitoku had only a beautiful, intellectual understanding of Zen after all.*

## Echu Expels His Disciple

Tanka paid a visit to Echu, who was napping. "Is your teacher in?" asked Tanka of the attending disciple. "Yes, he is in, but he does not want to see anyone," said the disciple, whose name was Tangen. "You are expressing the situation profoundly," Tanka said. "Even if Buddha comes, my teacher does not want to see him," disciple Tangen replied. "You are certainly a good disciple. Your teacher ought to be proud of you," and, with these words of praise, Tanka left. When Echu awoke, Tangen repeated the conversation to him. Echu beat Tangen and drove him from the temple.

*Echu was a Kokushi, or National Teacher, and well renowned. Tanka was a great Zen Master also. But Tangen, the disciple, greeted the visiting Master with newly-acquired Zen instead of a straightforward welcome. Tanka immediately spotted the imitation, but he heaped coals on the fire with his praise. When the glowing Tangen later bragged to his teacher, Echu put out his fire fast enough and drove him from the temple, too. Later, Tanka heard of this event and commented that Echu indeed deserved to be called National Teacher. Echu and Tanka understood each other perfectly.*

## Snapping the Fingers

Zengetsu, a monk poet, wrote a poem containing the following two verses:

The snap of two fingers  
 Makes a sharp sound,  
 But in hollow vessels  
 Echoes rebound.

Daizui heard this poem and, on meeting Zengetsu, asked, "What is the meaning?"  
 Zengetsu could not answer.

*Zengetsu was a Zen poet, and this koan deals with the first two verses of one of his poems. It was a custom in those days for Zen monks upon meeting to snap their fingers. The snapping of fingers had three meanings: a warning (for awareness), a surprise (for enlightenment), and an erasing of human troubles. Monks should know the true meaning of the finger snapping, but the poet comments that few really do. It is a human tendency to observe the other fellow. When Daizui met Zengetsu, he asked him the meaning. Zengetsu could not answer; he could only write beautiful lines. Many priests and scholars can give wonderful lectures, but how many are able to live them?*

## Rinzai Plants a Pine Tree

Rinzai was planting a young pine tree one day when his Master, Obaku, came along. "The monastery is surrounded by wonderful trees. Why do you plant this pine tree?" Obaku asked. "For two reasons," Rinzai replied. "First, to beautify the monastery with this evergreen and, second, to establish a landmark for the next generation." Rinzai then tamped the ground three times with his hoe to make the sapling more secure. "I don't like your self-assertion," Obaku said sternly. Rinzai ignored this remark, tamped the ground three times as before, and murmured, "All done." "You will cause my teaching to remain in the world," Obaku concluded.

*Whatever one does should be done with deep confidence. The teacher, Obaku, knew that Rinzai had attained the essence of Zen and was planting a unique "Rinzai Zen" at the monastery, but he wanted to test it all the same. Even when Obaku criticized him, Rinzai was completely unmoved. Obaku, finally, expresses his delight. When one attains enlightenment, the manifestations may be different but the essence is the same.*





## **VII**

# **Beyond Reason**

Truth is always beyond reason just as life is beyond reason. Zen, the truth of life, Nirvana, or enlightenment, are all beyond reach of the intellect. Enlightenment can not be attained by intellectualization. Truth can be understood only through one's direct experience, just as cold and heat are experienced only directly. Birds sing, water flows, rain falls, people love. There is no reason; they just do. Zen is beyond reason because it deals with life.

## Sun-Faced Buddhas, Moon-Faced Buddhas

Baso, the great teacher, was ill. A disciple visited him and asked, "Sir, during these recent days, how is your health?" Baso replied, "Sun-faced Buddhas, moon-faced Buddhas."

*According to one sutra, the Sun-Faced Buddha's life span was 1,800 years, and the Moon-Faced Buddha's life span was one day and one night. Baso answered, in effect, "I may live 1,800 years or I may live only one day and night. Neither prospect concerns me. I am here; I am living." Zen's concern is the living now, not the life of yesterday or the life of the future. Baso does not talk about life—he lives it.*

## The Sound of One Hand

Mokurai said to the young novice Toyo, "You can hear the sound of two hands clapping. Now show me the sound of one hand."

*Mokurai was the Master of Kenninji Temple in Kyoto, Japan. Toyo was a novice, twelve years of age. He was too young to receive a koan, as did the older monks, but he persisted in asking until Mokurai finally gave him this one. What could the sound of one hand be? Toyo meditated and meditated. He took his Master all kinds of sounds for answers: dripping water, the music of geisha girls, wind, birds, crickets, locusts, and much else. He tried for many months until, exhausted with sounds, unable to think of any more, little Toyo entered true meditation and transcended all sounds. He said, "I could collect no more, so I reached the soundless sound." The sound of one hand is much louder than the sound of two hands. The one-hand sound vibrates throughout the world.*

## The Buddha's Flower

When the Buddha was on Grdhrakuta Mountain, he turned a flower in his fingers and held it before his listeners. All were silent. Only Maha-Kasapa smiled. Buddha said, "I have the eye of the true teaching, the heart of Nirvana, the true aspect of non-form, and the ineffable stride of Dharma. It is not expressed by words but especially transmitted beyond teaching. This teaching I have given to Maha-Kasapa."

*When the Buddha turned a flower in his fingers and held it before his listeners, only Maha-Kasapa smiled. He understood the mind of the Buddha. The flower is flower, nothing else. It has no pretense, no pride, no shame. The essence of all things is the wordless word, the formless form. Truth is not words. Words and teachings merely point. Zen is transmitted without words from mind to mind.*

## Isan's Time

Isan said to his monks, "Winter repeats its cold days every year. Last year was as cold as this year, and next year we will have the same cold weather. Tell me, monks, what the days of the year are repeating." Gyosan, the senior disciple, made a traditional gesture of respect and remained silent. "I knew you could not answer my question," Isan said and turned to his junior disciple, Kyogen, and asked, "What do you say?" Kyogen replied, "I am sure I can answer your question." But before he could proceed further, Isan said, "I am glad the senior monk could not answer me."

*Time flows like water in the river. Winter and summer come and go naturally year after year and need no explanation. They are beyond human artificiality. Neither Gyosan, the senior disciple, nor Kyogen, the junior disciple, could answer the question their teacher presented. But the junior disciple was rash enough to assert he could. Isan cut him short. No answer is better than a conceptual answer. The truth is beyond concept and explanation. Ask me what love is; I will embrace you.*

## It Is Not Mind, Not Buddha, Not Things

A monk asked Nansen, "Is there a teaching no Master ever preached before?"

Nansen answered, "Yes."

"What is it?" asked the monk.

Nansen replied, "It is not mind, it is not Buddha, it is not things."

*This is a very difficult koan. The question really is: "Is the true Dharma (teaching) preachable or not?" When Nansen was asked if there was a teaching beyond words, he said, "Yes," obliging himself to describe it. Then he described it as not mind, not Buddha, not things. True Dharma is beyond words. The minute it is spoken, explained, or preached, it limits itself and is not the reality. All things and beings are in constant change. A thing that does not change is not reality; it is a concept.*

**This Mind Is Not Buddha**

A monk asked Baso, "What is Buddha?" Baso answered, "This mind is not Buddha."

*Baso always said, "This mind is Buddha." But for this particular student, who may have been attached to the familiar statement, Baso destroyed this conceptualized Buddha. Teachings are taught according to the needs and capacities of the student. One teaching will not do for all. Truth is dynamic, changing according to people, place, and time. Yet truth is always concrete and particular. Anything that one conceptualizes is not right. Anything to which one attaches is dead.*

## Husk of Millet

Seppo said, "This whole great world, if picked up, is like a husk of millet seed in size. Thrown down, and lying right before one's eyes, it is as unrecognizable as the proverbial black lacquer pail. Beat the drum and, altogether, search everywhere!"

*What is the whole world we think of and talk about? It is a concept. What we actually live is life. It is immediate and direct. My hunger is bigger and more important than the whole of this great world. The cut on my little finger is much greater than the war. I am greater than the sun. My toe hurts if stepped upon. It is larger than the world. The universe is as small as a husk of millet and as hard to see as a black lacquer pail on a dark night. It is insignificant because it has nothing to do with one's actual life here, now. Life is dynamic. Seppo wants us to live life.*



### Reciting Sutras

A Tendai priest was asked to recite sutras for a farmer's wife who had died. The farmer asked, "Do you really think my wife will benefit from all of this?" The priest replied, "Not only your wife, but all sentient beings will benefit." The farmer protested, "You say all sentient beings, but my wife may be weak and others will take advantage and receive more benefit. Please recite the sutra just for her."

The priest explained that it was Buddha's wish to offer blessings to all living beings. The farmer agreed that that was a fine teaching. "But," he said, "I have a neighbor who is rough and has been mean to me. Couldn't you just exclude him from all those sentient beings?"

*Laugh as we will at the farmer, are we much different? Man is the most selfish being as long as he identifies himself as "I."*

## Lion Cub

As Tokusan was working in the garden one day, he saw a monk coming up the road. Tokusan closed the gate. The monk knocked on the gate, and Tokusan asked, "Who is it?" The monk answered, "A lion cub." Tokusan opened the gate. The monk made a bow, and Tokusan jumped on his back as one would jump upon an animal, pinned him down, and said, "You devil! Where have you been?"

*The greatness of a Zen Master is determined by his ability to teach according to the capacity of each student. Each student is different, so the teacher prepares to meet each individually. Tokusan was known as a rough teacher, and this brash young monk knowingly came to challenge him. His answer to Tokusan's inquiry ("a lion cub") certainly is forward. It is quite dangerous to let in a lion cub, but Tokusan opened the gate anyway. The monk bowed in token respect, and at that instant Tokusan jumped on his back. The teaching is always different, according to the situation, time, place, and person.*

**Truth Beyond Words**

A monk asked Fuketsu, "Without speaking, without silence, how can you express the truth?" Fuketsu observed, "I always remember springtime in southern China. The birds sing among innumerable kinds of fragrant flowers."

*When asked, Fuketsu expressed the truth in his own way. Truth is beyond logic, beyond words or silence. One has to know it by one's own experience, as surely as Fuketsu knew it. Water does not quench thirst however long one looks at it or explains its thirst-quenching properties. Unless one drinks it, thirst remains.*

## Ultimate Stage

A monk asked Ryuge, "What did old Masters attain when they entered the ultimate stage?" "They were like burglars sneaking into a vacant house," Ryuge replied.

*This monk is like our modern pragmatist; he is a result-seeker. So he asks Ryuge what enlightenment is like. If I join the club, what are the benefits? When I die, where do I go? Ryuge replies by drawing the analogy of burglars sneaking into an empty house, which is, in fact, open and completely accessible—there is nothing to take, no one to see. The world is Nirvana from the beginning.*

### Chinshu's Large Radishes

A monk asked Joshu, "I hear that you used to be closely associated with Nansen. Is that so or not?" Joshu replied, "Chinshu produces large radishes."

*The radish was a very common, everyday vegetable in Chinese life, and Chinshu was a noted place for growing radishes. Joshu was Nansen's disciple, and everyone knew they were close. Here a monk asks such an obvious question to puzzle or embarrass Joshu. But it was no problem for Joshu. "Chinshu produces large radishes" is a most common and obvious fact of life, so obvious that no one can reply. It is just like saying, "the crow is black." True Zen life is simple, direct, and true to fact.*

## Toshi's Dinner

A certain Buddhist family invited Toshi to dinner. The head of the family set a tray full of grass in front of the monk. Toshi put his fists on his forehead and raised his thumbs like horns. He was then brought the regular dinner. Later, a fellow monk asked Toshi to explain the reason for his strange action. "Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva," answered Toshi.

*In olden days the custom of challenge (in order to test understanding) was common among Zen students. So the head of the family, perhaps, tried to test Toshi by offering him a tray of grass instead of dinner. Toshi, without anger, question, or explanation, imitated a cow. What else could the host do but bring out the proper dinner? Toshi was challenged, but he easily won. Later, a brother monk asked Toshi about the true meaning of the contest. Still Toshi did not explain. He simply replied, "Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva" (the symbolic expression of Buddha's compassion). This had no direct reference to the question; it was like exclaiming, "It's a wonderful day! Count your blessings."*

### Jojoza Stands Still

Jojoza asked Rinzai, "What is the gist of the Buddha Law?" Rinzai leaped from his seat, seized Jojoza, cuffed him, and thrust him away. Jojoza stood rooted to the spot, unable to speak. A monk, who had witnessed this scene, reprimanded Jojoza, saying, "You are supposed to bow after receiving instruction." As Jojoza bowed, he was enlightened.

*Jojoza was probably an old student who was well informed. He came to see Rinzai to test him. Rinzai intuitively knew Jojoza was neither sincere nor humble. But Jojoza became humble and bowed. He realized that knowledge is not Zen.*

### Silver Bowl Heaped with Snow

A monk asked Haryo, "Just what is this Deva Religion?" Haryo replied, "Snow is heaped inside the silver bowl."

*"Deva Religion" identifies the teaching of Kana-deva, the fifteenth patriarch following the Buddha, who stressed the Buddha Mind or Void. This teaching described reality as: essence, manifestation, function. The monk's question in this koan can be read as: "What is Zen?" Snow heaped inside a silver bowl, a white heron in the bright moonlight—they look alike; they are hard to distinguish from each other, but they are different. Each has its own life. Zen could be described, also, as essence, manifestation, and function. But if one sees only this aspect, one does not see Zen. Yet, each is Zen. The universal is particular, and the particular is universal. Eternity is moment: the eternal moment. Love is universal but expressed in concrete acts. Zen is the totality of life. But each act of living is the absolute total life itself.*



**Shogen's Three Statements**

Shogen asked, "Why does the enlightened man not stand on his feet and explain himself?" He also said, "It is not necessary for speech to come from the tongue." And he added, "Why can the enlightened man not cut away the entanglements round his feet?"

*Why doesn't the enlightened man explain Zen? The truth of the universe, the truth of life, can not be explained—even by an enlightened one. If one wishes to know what it is, he must realize it by himself. Why does not speech necessarily come from the tongue? Oratory need not be technique, quality of voice, or beauty of words. It can be the shout of life itself. Why can the enlightened man not walk freely? If he is attached, even to enlightenment, he is hobbled.*

## Behind the Paper Screen

Zengen, a Zen Master, sat concealed behind a hanging paper screen. A monk, coming for sanzen, had to lift the screen in order to greet the teacher. "How strange," the monk commented. The teacher gazed at the monk wordlessly, then said, "Do you understand?" "No, I do not understand," the monk replied. "Before any Buddhas appeared in the world," said the teacher, "it was the same as the present moment. Why don't you understand?" Later, the monk mentioned this incident to Zen teacher Sekiso. Sekiso praised Zengen, saying, "Brother Zengen is like a master archer. He never shot an arrow without hitting the mark."

*The Zen method of teaching is intuitive and often wordless. Master Zengen was silent; then he asked the monk if he understood. The monk must have been a novice, for he did not even understand the question. Zengen, trying to explain, next said that from the beginning all things are as they are. When Sekiso heard about this, he commented that Zengen had presented the Dharma directly, but the poor monk had not understood. Poor monk! He could not see it even though it was right before his eyes and someone pointed it out.*

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## The Hempen Shirt

A monk asked Joshu, "All things come from the One, but where does the One come from?" Joshu answered, "When I was in the province of Sei, I made a hempen shirt that weighed seven pounds."

*This koan is very famous. That all things come from the One is the first step in Buddhist understanding. It is not hard to grasp. But the question is, what about this One? How did the absolute arise? Each individual is "one" in the relative sense. But, interestingly, each individual one is, in itself, absolute. Microcosm and macrocosm are the same. East and west are different, but if one travels west, one will arrive east and eventually return to the starting point. In truth there is no east and west; only in this relative world do we have east and west. The monk who asked Joshu the question tried, perhaps, to embarrass the old Master. But Joshu answered from a totally different world. If one attaches to the words, "hempen shirt" or "seven pounds," one will never understand. Reality is not rationality. Joshu answered with reality, the concrete facts, totally transcending rationality. Truth is always concrete.*

**Going and Returning**

A monk asked his Master, "What do you think of a monk who goes from the monastery and never returns?" The teacher replied, "He is ungrateful." The student then asked, "What do you think of a monk who goes out of the monastery but comes back again?" The teacher said, "He remembers the kindness."

*The monastery is the spiritual home where one attains realization. When an individual enters the monastery, it is because of the teacher there, not because of the building or the institution itself. The teaching, or Dharma, has no form or color, so how is this colorless, formless teaching seen and understood? It is understood through the character of the teacher, called Zenjishiki, which means "good knowledge." When one attains realization by meeting the Zenjishiki, he and the teacher are one in the Dharma, so there is really no going or returning. There is no graduation in Zen.*

## The Buffalo Passes Through the Lattice Door

Goso said, "If, for example, a buffalo passes through the lattice to the edge of the abyss, his horns and his head and his hoofs all pass through. Why can't the tail also pass?"

*We know what a buffalo is, but we must understand what the buffalo exemplifies. And why can't the tail, that could most easily pass through the lattice, pass through while the whole body can? The buffalo is the sensuous being. The head, horns, and four legs go out through the openings in the latticework much as our actions, words, and thoughts continually pass out through our five senses. In such a state man stands precariously balanced on the edge of an abyss, threatened by "the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to." But the tail—the true self, the Buddha-nature—does not go out in response to illusions. It is never dissipated, diminished, or threatened.*

### Carrying the Bell-staff Around the Meditation Seat

Magoku took up his bell-staff one day and went to Shokyo's temple. There he marched, in solemn ritual, three times around Shokyo's meditation seat, rang the bell once, and stopped, standing upright. Shokyo said, "Very well done." Next Magoku went to Nansen's temple and repeated the ritual. But Nansen said, "No good." Magoku protested, "Your Reverence, Master Shokyo said 'well done.' Why do you say 'no good'?" Nansen replied, "Although Shokyo was right, you are wrong. What you did was a mere shifting of the wind. In the end it would result in your downfall."

*Magoku carried the bell-staff around the meditation seat of his brother monks, disturbing their meditation and showing off. Shokyo said "well done." What else can you say to such a rascal? But Nansen stopped the foolishness before it could do Magoku real harm. All he was doing was "shifting the wind" about as he moved.*

*So, in life, however strong one looks, however much one shows off by so-called success, be it wealth, prestige, or power, it is merely "shifting the wind." Eventually all end with old age and death.*

## The Dry Creek

A monk asked Seppo, "When the old creek of Zen dries out and there is not a drop of water left, what can I see there?" Seppo answered, "There is the bottomless water that you can not see." The monk asked, "How can one drink that water?" Seppo replied, "Not with the mouth."

Later, the same monk went to Joshu and repeated this dialogue. Joshu commented, "If one can not drink the water with his mouth, neither can he take it in through his nose." The monk then said, "When the old creek of Zen dries out and there is not a drop of water, what can I see there?" Joshu answered, "The water will taste as bitter as quinine." "What happens to one who drinks that water?" asked the monk. "He will lose his life," came the reply.

When Seppo heard of their conversation, he paid homage to Joshu, saying, "Joshu is a living Buddha. I shall not answer questions hereafter." And from that time on he sent all newcomers to Joshu.

*The Zen creek has bottomless water and never dries out. But it seems to dry out for some students: they reach a dead end. No matter how hard they discipline themselves, or to what extremes they push themselves physically and mentally, the impasse remains. In one very real sense if this continues, they will die: asceticism borders on abuse.*

*On the other hand, one must die in order to be born into a new life. The ego self must die in order for the selfless self to emerge. In the Jodo, or Pure Land, school of Buddhism the word "ojo" means both death and birth. "O" means "to go," and "jo" means "to be born" or "live" in the Pure Land, or Nirvana. Where there is self there is no Nirvana; where there is no Nirvana there is no self.*



### Ungo's Instruction

Master Ungo had many disciples. One, who came from Korea, said to him, "I have realized something within me that I cannot describe at all." "Why is that so," asked Ungo. "It cannot be difficult." "Then you must do it for me," the monk replied. Ungo said, "Korea! Korea!" and closed the dialogue. Later, a teacher of the Oryu school criticized the incident saying, "Ungo could not understand the monk at all. There was a great sea between them even though they lived in the same monastery."

*Ungo, a great Master, was the founder of the Chinese Soto school and was credited with more than 1,500 students. The student in this dialogue wants the Master to put his experience of enlightenment into words. It is as though a man in love were to say, "I love you; I feel something, but I cannot describe it." The woman would reply, "Why not? It cannot be difficult!" "Then you describe it for me," he would plead. She would answer, "Oh you, you!" and throw her arms around him. Enlightenment is the actuality of life's reality and, like love, can best be known by experience. As for the Oryu teacher's criticism of Ungo, it is out of order.*

## A Sort of Great Death

Joshu asked Tosu, "What if one who has been dead were to rise from the grave?" Tosu replied, "One can not tell for sure at night. Such apparitions are best inspected in daylight."

*Joshu, who already knows, asks Tosu what it is like when one who has been dead to the truth about life, merely existing, suddenly awakens, becomes enlightened. Tosu answers, in effect, there is no half dead and half alive. Make yes and no clear; make black and white distinct. These definitions can not be made in the dark. One must jump into the bright daylight where nothing is hidden and one can see clearly. A ghost is a symbol of the indeterminate state. It appears at dusk or at night. It has no legs of its own and simply drifts about. It has no mind of its own and simply laments or regrets. It has no life of its own and merely frightens others.*

*Awakening is to put an end to this half-determined state of life. Such awakening is called "Daishi Ichiban," meaning "The Great Death First." For the world of ultimate reality, the world of Nirvana, only opens after one dies to this worldly life. But people cling and are afraid. Only when one comes to the dead end can the true life begin.*

### The Non-expressible Truth

When Nansen visited Hyakujo, Hyakujo asked him, "Is there any teaching left that all the sages of old have not explained to people?" Nansen replied, "There is." Hyakujo said, "What is it?" Nansen said, "Not mind, not Buddha, not things." Hyakujo then said, "Has your exposition ended?" "Yes," said Nansen, "what is yours?" Hyakujo replied, "I am neither sage nor saint; how can I express what has never been expressed?" Nansen said, "I can not either." Hyakujo concluded, "For your sake I have finished my exposition and with good results!"

*"Not mind, not Buddha, not things" is the essence of this koan. All things are continually changing, is Nansen's inexpressible truth. But the one who says he knows, does not really know; the one who says that he does not know, is the one who really knows.*

## Heaven and Earth, the Same Essence

In talking to Master Nansen, the official, Rikko, said, "Choho taught that heaven, earth, and I spring from the same root and that I and all things are of one essence. Now this is very mystic." Nansen took the official to the front garden and pointed to a single flower, saying, "People today see this flower like a dream."

*Rikko was a learned government official and a good friend of Nansen. The statement Rikko quotes is one he admired very much. But Nansen calls his attention to a flower, saying, in effect, many people see this flower as if it were a dream. The flower has a very short life before it fades away; it is only a brief manifestation of the essence. Thus, people see human life and all things as temporary, transitory. But that is not the Zen way of understanding. The flower is not just a dream-like manifestation. Life is not a dream-like existence. The world of Rikko and the world of Nansen are quite different. Nansen's life and world is dynamic, positive, subjective. Rikko's world is static, negative, objective. Life, or even a flower, is not something to be explained. To understand, one must live it.*



花蝶图  
[Red square seal]

## VIII

# A Matter of Life and Death

In the world of truth, “yes” and “no” are clear, and the truth of life is a matter of life and death. Where there is life, there is no death. Where there is no death—that is life. The two can not be together as one, they can not coexist. Ordinarily we take things for granted, and we don’t become serious. But if life itself is at stake, then the solution is there, enlightenment is there. The truth is never lukewarm. While we are living, we are facing death every minute. When we once realize this fact, we become sincere, concerned, and honest within ourselves. The reality of our life is a matter of life and death. Zen teaches that life is precious because we are living at *this very moment*. Only if one lives fully, can one die peacefully, without regret.

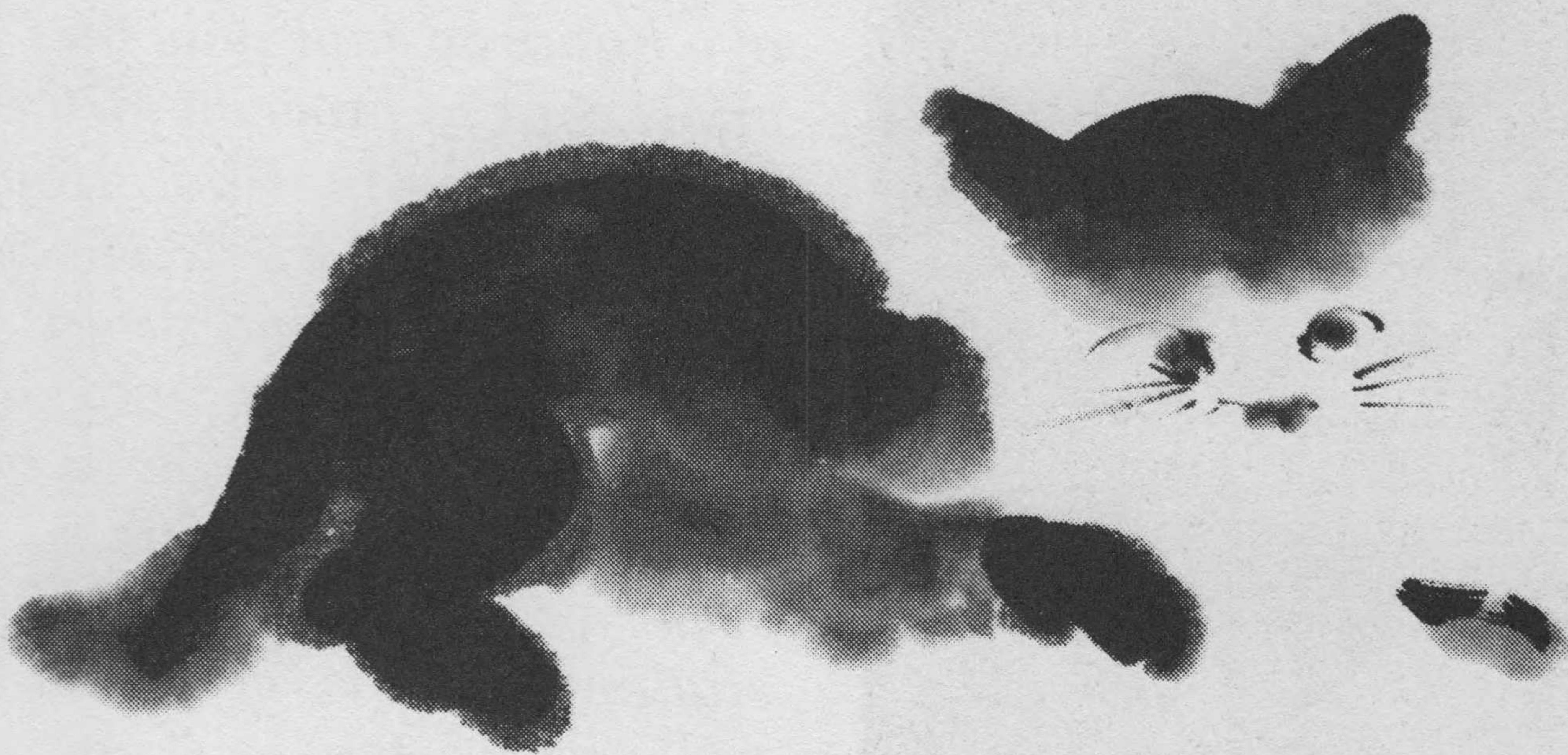
## Nansen Cuts the Cat in Two

Nansen saw the monks of the Eastern and Western halls fighting over a cat. He seized the cat and told the monks, "If any of you say a good word, you can save the cat." No one answered. So Nansen cut the cat in two. That evening Joshu returned, and Nansen related the incident. Joshu removed his sandals and, placing them on his head, walked out. Nansen said, "If you had been there, you could have saved the cat."

*This koan is hard to accept. "Do not kill any being" is the first precept of Buddha's teaching; reverence for life is the first principle of Buddhism. Further, a long tradition dictates that on any temple premise no one is killed, not even a mouse. If enemy soldiers or convicts flee to a temple, their lives are protected by sanctuary. But Nansen killed an innocent cat.*

*In Zen, enlightenment is of prime importance. Even at the price of life, a truth-seeker looks for the Way. The Way of Zen is a matter of life and death. If one finds the Way and dies—even that same evening—still his life is fulfilled.*

*If any of the monks had said an enlightened word or had done an enlightened deed, the cat's life would have been spared. But no one said anything, and Master Nansen did not compromise. When Joshu heard of the incident, he took off his shoes and put them on his head. How upside down! But if Joshu had been at the scene, he might have taken the knife from Nansen and demanded the Master's life. Cutting the cat!*



*Such a thing can not be tolerated. In the face of the truth of life there is no argument, no reason, only action.*

*The modern pragmatic mind and utilitarian philosophers do not understand Zen. Why do birds sing? Why do flowers bloom? They are life itself. Unless life is understood, this koan never will be.*



## Proceed from the Top of a Hundred-foot Pole

Seiko asked, "How can you proceed on from the top of a hundred-foot pole?" Another Master said, "One sitting on the top of a hundred-foot pole has entered the Way but is not yet the real thing. He should proceed on from there and reveal his true self in the ten directions."

*Anyone can climb to the top of a hundred-foot pole by effort. But to proceed farther is logically impossible. How can the student do it? He can come to understand satori (Nirvana, enlightenment) but knowing what satori is, is not Zen. Zen is life, and life is superior to logic. Unless the student puts his life into it, he will never attain it. If one wants to test gold, one must smelt it in a blazing furnace. If one wants a cub, one must go into the lion's den.*

*As for the second Master's comment, merely attaining enlightenment (sitting on top of the pole) is not enough. One must go farther—in the ten directions of east, west, north, south, northeast, northwest, southeast, southwest, above, and below. One must live satori, the Master says. Real enlightenment means "Samsara [everyday life] is Nirvana; Nirvana is Samsara."*

**Lost His Leg**

Unmon went to Bokushu's temple to seek Zen. The first time he went, he was not admitted. The second time he went, he was not admitted. The third time he went, the gate was opened slightly by Bokushu, and Unmon stuck his leg in to try to gain entrance. Bokushu pushed him out and closed the large gate quickly—so quickly that Unmon's leg was caught and broken.

*In ancient days broken bones usually resulted, at best, in crippling for life. But for Unmon seeking truth was a matter of life and death. In the world of truth one finds something more important and more valuable than physical life.*

## Bodhidharma Pacifies the Mind

Bodhidharma sat facing the wall. His future successor stood in the snow and presented his severed arm to Bodhidharma. He cried, "My mind is not pacified. Master, pacify my mind."

Bodhidharma answered, "If you bring me that mind, I will pacify it for you." The successor said, "When I search for my mind, I can not hold it." Bodhidharma concluded, "Then your mind is pacified already."

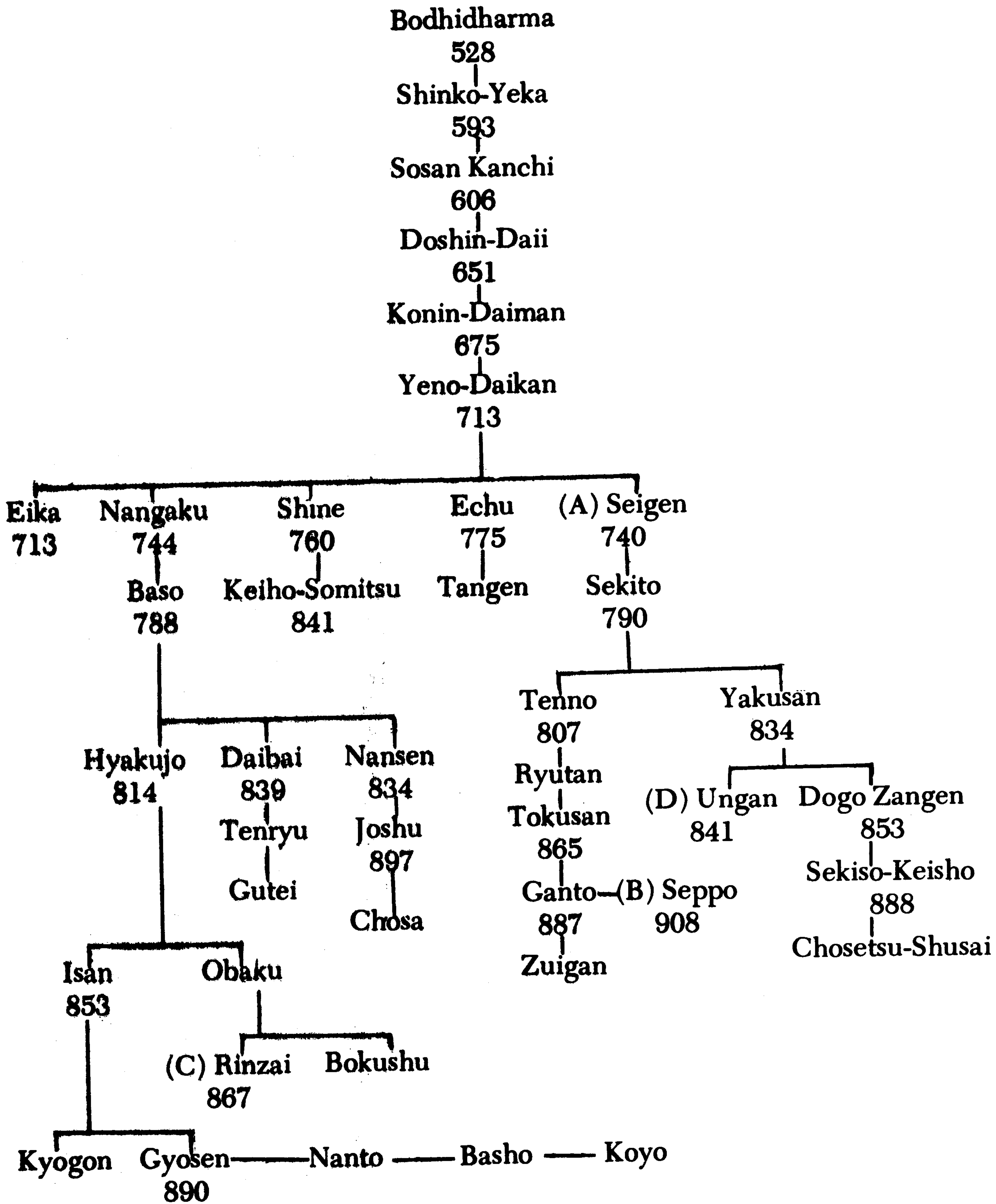
*Bodhidharma, an Indian by birth and the twenty-eighth patriarch to succeed the Buddha, came to China in A.D. 520 and became the father of Zen (called Chan in China). He meditated wordlessly for nine years facing a stone wall. His successor, the second patriarch of Zen, Eka, came to him as a student and asked the essence of Zen, or the Way. Eka was a great scholar, a genius of his age, but his mind was not at ease. He knew all about the world, but he did not know about himself. Bodhidharma paid no attention to him, even though it was winter and Eka had stood in the snow all day and all night. He would not even look at Eka. In desperation Eka cut off his arm and presented it to Bodhidharma. Seeing Eka's utter sincerity, Bodhidharma finally looked at him. When Eka asked to have his mind pacified, Bodhidharma agreed to do so—as soon as Eka produced the mind in question. But Eka looked and could not find it, for there was no such mind. Most of our troubles are of our own making. Look within; clarify. There is really no trouble. Your mind is pacified already.*

**Man Up a Tree**

Kyogen said, "It is like a person up a tall tree, hanging from a branch by his teeth; his hands can't grasp a bough; his feet won't reach one. Under the tree there is another person who asks the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West. If the person in the tree doesn't answer, he evades the problem; if he does answer, he will fall and lose his life."

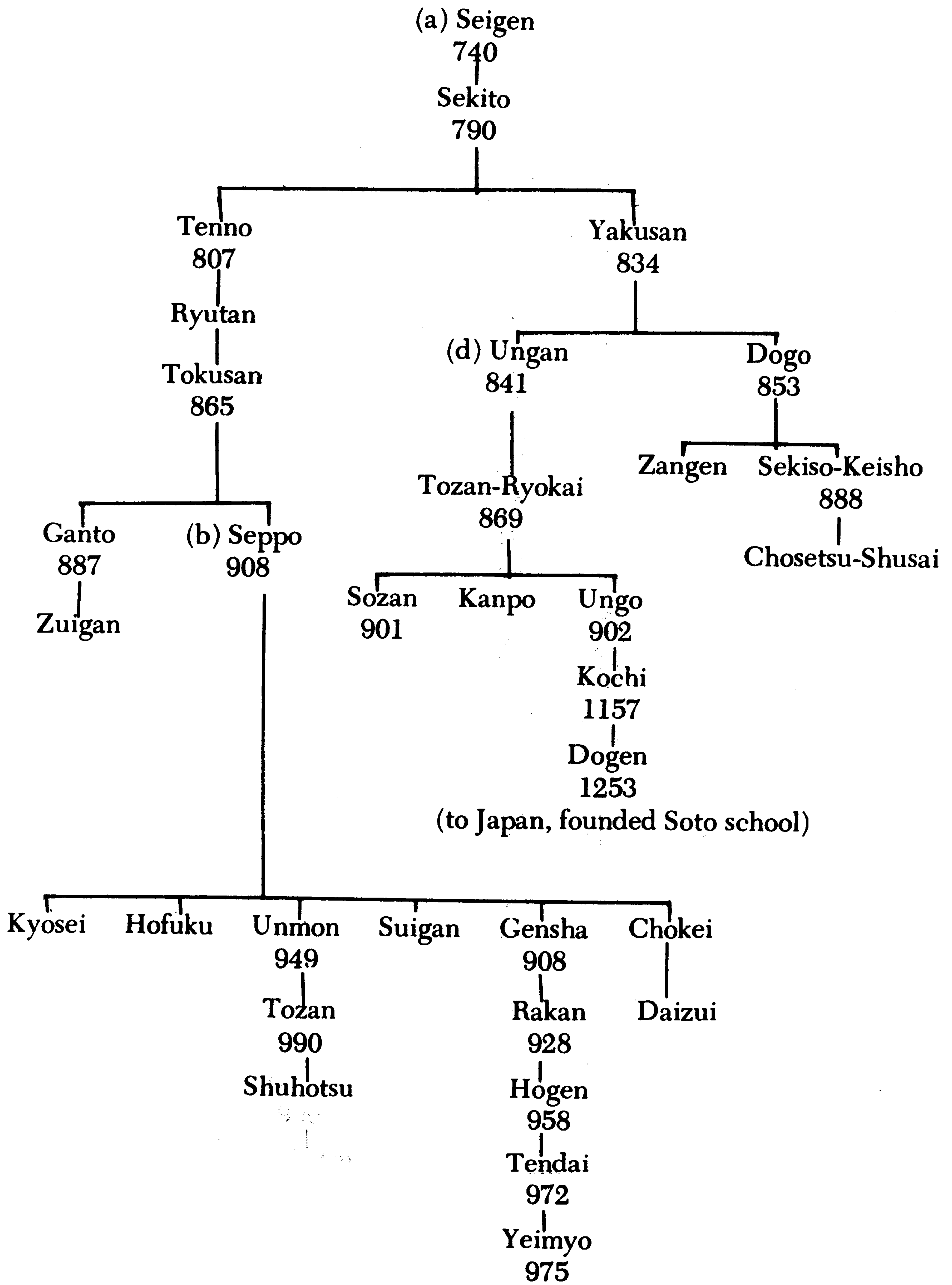
*Enlightenment is a matter of life and death. It requires total effort, not mere intellectual understanding. Some students try to understand koans intellectually, and once they have perceived the intellectual content, they think they have understood. That kind of understanding has nothing to do with life. Zen life is the life of totality.*

# Zen Transmission Lineage

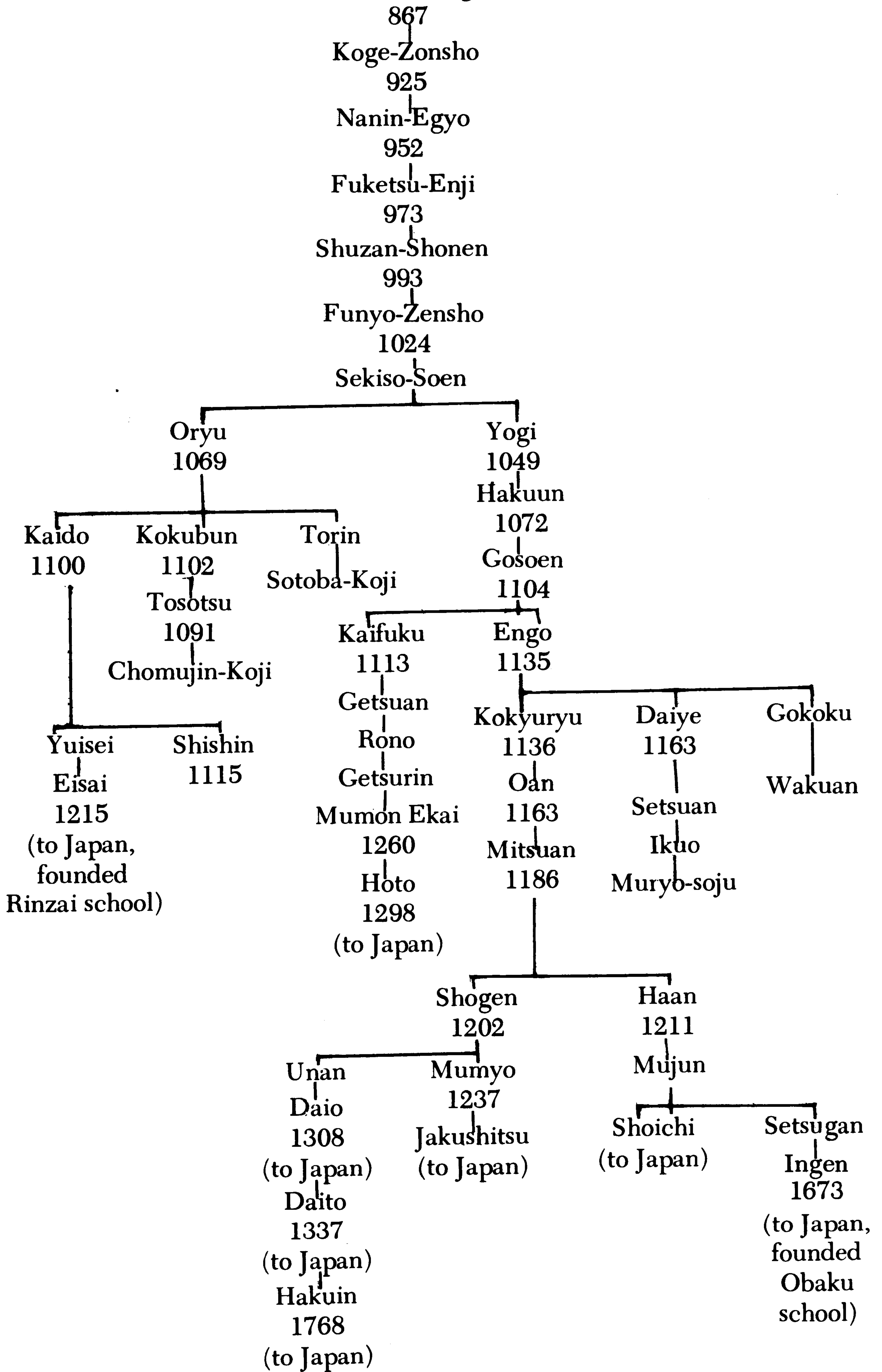


*Prefix letters indicate that more extended lineage will be found on succeeding charts.*

*Dates given are those of death; where not given, dates are uncertain or unknown.*



## (c) Rinzai-Gigen



# **Glossary of Buddhist Names and Terms**

- Abhidharma:** One of the three main divisions of the Pali canon; *see* Tripitaka.
- Agama Sutra:** A collection of Buddhist scriptures originally in Sanskrit existing today in complete form only in Chinese translations.
- Amida:** Japanese name for the ideal Buddha, Amita, also expressed in Indian as Amitayus or Amitabha, the Buddha of eternal life and boundless light. (In Chinese, A-mi-t'o-fo.)
- Amida Sutra:** The Smaller Eternal Life Sutra.
- Ananda:** Cousin of the Gautama Buddha and one of his ten outstanding disciples. Ananda was the Buddha's constant companion and personal attendant for the last twenty-five years of Buddha's life. Ananda's name is synonymous with sincerity and faithfulness.
- Ango:** Traditional summer retreat for Buddhist monks.
- Arhat:** One who has reached Nirvana; however, the term has come to have a special meaning in Mahayana Buddhism to denote one who is striving for his own enlightenment, in contrast with the Bodhisattva who strives for the enlightenment of all beings.
- Avalokitesvara:** The Bodhisattva of compassion. (Kannon in Japanese; Kwan-yin in Chinese.)
- Avatamsaka Sutras:** The basic text for the Kegon school of Buddhism, these sutras had considerable influence on Zen thought. They stress the Buddhahood of all sentient beings, the identity of Nirvana and Samsara, and the wisdom and compassion of the Bodhisattvas.
- Bell-staff:** As the name implies, a monk's staff with a bell affixed on top, used in ritual.
- Bodhi:** Indian term for enlightenment.



- Bodhidharma:** Indian Buddhist monk who went to China about A.D. 520 and founded the Chan, or Zen, school of Buddhism.
- Bodhisattva:** Sanskrit term used in Buddhism for a truth-seeker or for one who is going to become a Buddha. Also used in the Mahayana school in a very special sense as one who is already enlightened but who is not apart from worldly life and who works for the enlightenment of all beings.
- Bodhi Tree:** An assattha tree (*Ficus religiosa*) under which the Buddha sat when he attained enlightenment. The offspring of this original tree is still growing at Buddha Gaya, India.
- Buddha:** As a generic term, an awakened or enlightened one.
- Chan:** Chinese word for Zen. School of Buddhism founded in China by Bodhidharma.
- Cravaka:** One who seeks to overcome within himself the three poisons: greed, ignorance, and anger.
- Dana:** Giving, or sharing; one of the six Paramitas.
- Dharma:** The Buddhist doctrine as proclaimed by Gautama Buddha, or the truth itself.
- Dharma Kaya:** See Tri Kaya.
- Dhyana:** Meditation. One of the six Paramitas.
- Diamond Sutra:** Mahayana Buddhist sutra belonging to the Prajna Paramita sutras, the central teaching of which is Sunyata, or Emptiness.
- Dokusan:** Formal, individual instruction given to a Zen student by a Master.
- Enlightenment:** Awakening to the truth of life, of self; Nirvana.
- Five Precepts:** Sometimes called Sila. Buddhist morality and one of the six Paramitas. The five precepts are to abstain from killing, stealing, adultery, lying, and intoxication.
- Gassho:** Japanese word indicating the gesture of placing hands palm-to-palm to signify highest respect.
- Gautama, Gotama:** (Sanskrit and Pali, respectively.) The family name of the historical Buddha. His personal name was Siddhartha. Siddhartha Gautama, 563-483 B.C., was born in India in the Himalayan foothills, the son of a king. His early life was luxurious; he married and had one son. At 29, traumatized by the sight of suffering, sickness, old age, and

death, he renounced his status, left home, and became a truth-seeker. First trying, then abandoning asceticism, Gautama adopted the middle path, attained enlightenment, and became the founder of Buddhism, spending the rest of his life, until his death at 80, traveling, teaching, and gathering disciples.

**Grdhrakuta:** Vulture's Peak. A mountain peak in Rajgir, India, where the Buddha reputedly spoke many sutras.

**Hinayana:** Literally, "smaller (*hina*) vehicle (*yana*)." Name given to Theravada Buddhists by Mahayana Buddhists. One of the two main schools of Buddhism, the Hinayana, or Theravada, stresses individual enlightenment and uses as its only scriptures the original Pali Tipitaka, or canon.

**Ideograph:** Chinese character. Originally a form of picture writing, which through the centuries became highly abstract and stylized.

**Judo:** Literally, gentle way. One of the martial arts in which mental attitude is as important as physical skill.

**"Khats!":** Phonetic rendering of deep, sudden Zen cry.

**Kalpa:** Sanskrit word meaning an incredibly long period of time. A kalpa is sometimes described as the time it would take for a granite block forty miles square to be worn to nothingness if every three years an angel landed and brushed the rock with the sleeve of its dress, then flew away.

**Karma:** The law of cause and effect. There is individual karma and social karma, both connected. All states and conditions in life are the result of previous actions, and present actions determine future events.

**Karuna:** Compassion. In Buddhist thought Karuna and Prajna (wisdom) go together, for it is felt that compassion without wisdom may be misdirected and wisdom without compassion can result in isolation.

**Kasapa:** One of the ten outstanding disciples of the Gautama Buddha.

**Kendo:** The art of fencing in which awareness, discipline, and self-mastery are stressed above competition and winning.

**Koan:** Stories, or problems, given by Zen Masters.

**Kokushi:** In China and Japan, National Teacher, tutor to the emperor and religious advisor to the nation.

**Ksanti:** Patience; one of the six Paramitas.

**Mahayana:** Name, meaning "greater vehicle," adopted by the second great division of Buddhist teaching. Though both Hinayana (Theravada) and Mahayana have the same basic teaching, the Mahayana stresses the Bodhisattva ideal.

**Maitreya:** The future Buddha. (Miroku in Japanese; Mi-leh in Chinese.)

**Manjusri:** The Bodhisattva of wisdom. (Monju in Japanese; Wen-sha in Chinese.)

**Meditation:** Central to all Buddhist schools and sects. In Buddhism the practice of meditation is not used to deaden but to awaken the mind to the truth of life.

**Mind:** When capitalized it refers to the absolute, the ultimate reality, not the conscious or subconscious mind of psychology.

**Mondo:** Zen questions-and-answers.

**Nagarjuna:** Indian Buddhist philosopher of the third century, founder of the Madhyamika school, known for his treatises on Sunyata, or Emptiness.

**Nembutsu:** Calling the name of the Amida Buddha, a practice of the Pure Land school. Correctly done, a form of meditation.

**Nirmanakaya:** See Tri Kaya.

**Nirvana:** Sanskrit word often misunderstood as a state of mindless bliss or annihilation of the personality. Nirvana is a state of complete awareness, complete one-ness, that is, the state of mind of an enlightened one.

**Nyoi:** Literally, "as the mind wishes." Dharma stick used by Zen Masters for many purposes, among them rapping dull students.

**Pali Canon:** See Tipitaka.

**Paramitas:** Mahayana term referring to the six qualities, or virtues, that lead to enlightenment: Dana (sharing); Sila (precepts); Ksanti (patience); Virya (perseverance); Dhyana (meditation); and Prajna (wisdom).

- Parinirvana:** Complete Nirvana; physical death.
- Patriarchs:** Fathers of Buddhism. Each school has its own lineage traceable back to the Gautama Buddha. Bodhidharma is considered the first patriarch of Zen.
- Prajna:** Wisdom, the essential teaching of Zen. Also one of the six Paramitas.
- Pure Land:** Buddhist school originating in China. Principle scripture is the Sukhavativyuha (Great Eternal Life Sutra), which stresses the realization of Amida Buddha and describes the Pure Land.
- Sakyamuni:** Literally, "sage of the Sakya clan," a name sometimes given to the Gautama Buddha.
- Samadhi:** In meditation, a state of highest concentration.
- Samantabhadra:** Bodhisattva of love. (Fugen in Japanese; P'uh sien in Chinese.)
- Sambhoga Kaya:** *See* Tri Kaya.
- Samsara:** The ordinary, everyday world; the world of birth and death.
- Sanzen:** Formal Zen meditation at temple.
- Sarira:** Gem-like bone supposed to be found in a person's ashes after cremation.
- Satori:** Japanese Zen term for the enlightenment experience.
- Sensei:** Japanese word for teacher.
- Sila:** *See* Five Precepts.
- Staff:** Used by Buddhist monks in India, China, and Japan. Had both practical and symbolic significance.
- Sukhavativyuha:** Great Eternal Life Sutra, the basic sutra of the Pure Land school in China and Japan.
- Sunyata:** Emptiness; *see* Void.
- Sutra, Sutta:** (Sanskrit and Pali, respectively.) Generic term for Buddhist scriptures.
- Tathagata:** Another name for the Buddha; a word meaning suchness, thus come, as it is.
- Tendai:** A school of Japanese Buddhism brought from China by Dengyo Daishi in 805. Teachings are based on the Lotus Sutra. Stresses the universality of Buddha-nature and its attainment.

**Ten Directions, Ten Quarters:** The universe. The ten directions are: north, east, south, west, northeast, northwest, southeast, southwest, above, and below.

**Theravada:** Literally, "teachings of the elders." Same as Hinayana, now represented mainly in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia.

**Third Age:** See Three Ages.

**Three Ages:** A description of three periods in Buddhism. In the First Age Buddhism is truly taught and practiced; in the Second Age Buddhism is mere formality and ritual; in the Third Age Buddhism declines and even the formality is abandoned.

**Three Poisons:** Buddhism lacks the concept of sin; instead, there are three things that poison life: greed, ignorance, and anger.

**Tipitaka:** Canon of Buddhist scriptures in Pali regarded as authoritative by the Theravada school. It is the most complete and earliest form of Buddhist teachings available. The Pali Canon consists of three baskets (*pitakas*): Vinaya (rules for governing monks); Sutta (words of the Buddha); Abhidhamma (condensed, systematized doctrine abstracted from the suttas).

**Transmigration:** In one sense, the transmigration of souls, upon death, into other bodies, or rebirth. In Buddhism, since there is no belief in soul as such, transmigration means the life of Samsara, a ceaseless repetition of suffering caused by ignorance.

**Transmission:** The passing of Dharma from mind to mind. In the case of succession, the transmission is official, and the successor inherits the leadership of the monastery along with the symbols of that authority: the bowl and the robe.

**Tri Kaya:** Literally, "the three bodies." Idea developed in Mahayana Buddhism to explain the relationship of ultimate reality to man. In Tri Kaya ultimate reality has three forms: Dharma Kaya (the formless, colorless, timeless absolute); Sambhoga Kaya (the ideal expression of the absolute, for ex-

ample, the Amida Buddha); Nirmana Kaya (the actual living expression, for example, the historical Gautama Buddha).

**Tripitaka:** Sanskrit for Tipitaka.

**Vimalakirti:** Foremost lay disciple of the Gautama Buddha, known for his overwhelming wisdom.

**Virya:** Effort, perseverance; one of the six Paramitas.

**Void:** Sunyata, or Emptiness. The Buddhist doctrine that all things are, in essence, empty. Emptiness has no negative connotation. Rather, it is emptiness in the sense that reality has no fixed form but is in continuous flux.

**Vulture's Peak:** See Grdhrakuta.

**Way:** In Buddhist thought the Way is the way of the universe.

**Za zen:** Sitting zen meditation.

**Zen:** Brought from China to Japan in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there are three schools: Rinzai, Soto, and Obaku. Teachings of all schools are the same, and only their methods differ slightly. Rinzai stresses abrupt awakening and makes heavy use of the koan; Soto emphasizes sitting meditation and the emergence of each person's unique Koan; and Obaku teaches gradual means to enlightenment.

**Zendo:** Meditation hall, or place where Zen is practiced and taught.

# Index of Koans

- Alone and Poor, 73
- Basho Does Not Teach, 205  
Basho's Staff, 85  
Behind the Paper Screen, 240  
Bells and Robes, 9  
Blockhead, 83  
Blow Out the Candle, 92  
Bodhidharma and the  
Emperor Wu, 12  
Bodhidharma Pacifies the  
Mind, 258  
Bokushu and the Empty-  
Headed Fool, 216  
Broken Tray, The, 163  
Buddha, A, 76  
Buddha's Body, 114  
Buddha's Flower, The, 226  
Buddhistic Age, 87  
Buffalo Passes Through the  
Lattice Door, The, 244
- Calling Card, 189  
Carrying the Bell-staff Around  
the Meditation Seat, 245  
Carrying the Bundle Under  
His Arm, 134  
Chinshu's Large Radishes, 235  
Cobra, The, 124  
Crossing a Stream, 84  
Cup of Tea, A, 78  
Cutting Trees, 91
- Daiten's Age, 116  
Drop of Water, 174  
Dry Creek, The, 246  
Dung Stick, A, 75  
Dust-Speck Samadhi, 126
- Echo's Inquiry About Buddha,  
156  
Echu Expels His Disciple, 218  
Echu's Three Calls, 46  
Emperor Taishu's Dream, 80  
Every Day Is a Good Day, 3  
Everyday Life Is the Way, 176  
Everything is Best, 16  
Exact Moment for Hatching,  
The, 197  
Examining Two Monks, 96
- First Age Teaching, The, 62  
First Principle, The, 136  
Four Gates of Joshu, The, 157  
Front Three, Back Three, 122  
Funyo's Walking Stick, 158
- Ganto's Ax, 178  
Ganto's Two Meals, 10  
Garden of Medicinal Flowers,  
A, 56  
Gate of Paradise, The, 30  
Gensha's Blank Paper, 161  
Girl Comes out of Meditation,  
The, 22  
Giver Should Be Thankful,  
The, 68  
Going and Returning, 243  
Government Official, The, 104  
Greatest Depth, The, 182  
Gutei's One Finger Zen, 212  
Gyosan Draws a Line, 98  
Gyosan's Greeting, 47  
Gyosan Sits in Meditation, 183
- Heaven and Earth, the Same  
Essence, 250  
Hempen Shirt, The, 242

- Higher Understanding, A, 110  
 Hoju Turns His Back, 135  
 Holy Fruits, 170  
 How Do You See Your  
   Buddha-nature?, 51  
 How Trees and Grass Become  
   Enlightened, 200  
 Husk of Millet, 230  
 Hyakurei's Attainment, 186  
  
 Ideograph for Mind, The, 106  
 Inner Culture, 36  
 Iron Boat, The, 166  
 Isan's Time, 227  
 Isan Summons Two Official  
   Monks, 42  
 It Is Not Mind, Not Buddha,  
   Not Things, 228  
  
 Jimyo's Summary, 175  
 Jizo's Buddhism, 20  
 Jojoza Stands Still, 237  
 Joshu Investigates an Old  
   Woman, 48  
 Joshu Plans a Visit, 217  
 Joshu's Dwelling Place, 168  
 Joshu's Mu, 6  
 Joshu's Zen, 118  
  
 Kasapa's Preaching Sign, 139  
 Keichu's Wheel, 40  
 Kotei Strikes a Monk, 50  
 Kyosei's Big Stick, 100  
  
 Last Poem of Hoshin, The, 208  
 Lion Cub, 232  
 Living Alone, 164  
 Lost His Leg, 257  
 Lotus Blossoms and Leaves, 26  
  
 Managing the Monks, 144  
 Manjusri Enters the Gate, 17  
 Man Up a Tree, 259  
 Master Covers His Head, The,  
   77  
 Matter-of-Fact Advice, 32  
 Measuring the Water, 196  
 Meditating Long, Becoming  
   Weary, 207  
 Meditation Arm-rest, The, 53  
 Meeting a Zen Master on the  
   Road, 128  
 Meeting Students, 143  
 Million Objects, A, 132  
 Mind Is Not Buddha, 72  
 Mokusen's Hand, 119  
 Monk Is Rejected, A, 49  
 Monk's Funeral for a Fox, A,  
   94  
 Monk's Zen Gesture, A, 99  
 Moon Can Not Be Stolen, The,  
   70  
 Mugo's Fancies, 103  
 Mu, Joshu's, 6  
  
 Nansen Cuts the Cat in Two,  
   254  
 Nansen Rejects Both Monk  
   and Layman, 82  
 Nansen's Little Hut, 101  
 No Beard, 14  
 No Cold and Heat, 4  
 No-Monument Monument,  
   The, 198  
 Non-expressible Truth, The,  
   249  
 Nose Is Twisted, The, 54  
 Not Afraid to Die, 206  
 Not Flag, Not Wind, 66  
 No Water, No Moon, 120



- Oak Tree in the Garden, An, 154  
 Obaku and the Wine-Guzzlers, 39  
 Old Cow, Tetsuma, The, 194  
 One Road of Nirvana, The, 173  
 Opening Speech of Lazan, 79  
 Open Your Own Treasure House, 58  
 Opposite of Statement, The, 121  
 Original Face, 34  
 Overturning the Water Pail, 74  
 Peony, The, 88  
 Perfect Understanding (Daitso Chiso) Buddha, 130  
 Philosopher Asks Buddha, A, 19  
 Possessed of Insight, 137  
 Preaching Dharma, 112  
 Preaching from the Third Seat, 102  
 Preceding Teachers, 142  
 Proceed from the Top of a Hundred-foot Pole, 256  
 Punishing the Sky, 93  
 Real Eye, The, 177  
 Real Way Is Not Difficult, The, 23  
 Reciting Sutras, 231  
 Returning to the Ordinary World, 13  
 Rinzai Plants a Pine Tree, 220  
 Roso Faces the Wall, 38  
 Scented Grasses, Falling Flowers, 146  
 Secret Transmission, 109  
 Seijo's Two Souls, 8  
 Self Perishes When the Universe Perishes, The, 148  
 Seppo's Punctuality, 108  
 Shiko's Poem, 152  
 Shogen's Three Statements, 239  
 Short Staff, The, 5  
 Shozan's Phrase, 69  
 Silver Bowl Heaped with Snow, 238  
 Sitting Alone on Mount Taiyu, 202  
 Sixty Blows, 45  
 Six Ungraspables, The, 210  
 Smile in His Lifetime, A, 204  
 Snapping the Fingers, 219  
 Solving a Monk's Problem, 52  
 Sort of Great Death, A, 248  
 Sound of One Hand, The, 225  
 Sound of Raindrops, The, 125  
 Southern Mountain, The, 21  
 Sozan's Four Don'ts, 187  
 Statue of Avalokitesvara, The, 44  
 Stone Buddha, 86  
 Suigan's Eyebrows, 172  
 Sun-Faced Buddhas, Moon-Faced Buddhas, 224  
 Taking Up the Staff at Lotus Mountain, 188  
 Tapping the Arm-rest, 140  
 Taste of Banzo's Sword, The, 60  
 Temper, 59  
 Temple, The, 25  
 Ten-foot Square, 199  
 This Mind Is Not Buddha, 229  
 This Very Mind, 71

- Three Barriers of Tosotsu,  
     The, 41  
 Three Days, 150  
 Three Pounds of Flax, 153  
 Three Worlds, The, 180  
 Three Worlds, No Dharma, 55  
 Tipping Over a Water Vase,  
     33  
 Tokusan's Bowl, 138  
 Toshi's Dinner, 236  
 Touching Sanctity, 113  
 Tozan's Tripitaka, 185  
 Transmigration, 190  
 True Man of No Title, The, 37  
 True Path, The, 201  
 Truth Beyond Words, 233  
 Turtle in the Garden, The, 24  
 Two Monks Roll Up the  
     Screen, 97  
  
 Ultimate Stage, 234  
 Ultimate Teaching, The, 181  
 Ultimate Truth, The, 90  
 Ungo's Instruction, 247  
 Unko Sends Some Hakama,  
     165  
  
 Unmon's Family Tradition,  
     167  
 Unmon's Feast in the Joss  
     House, 184  
 Unmon's Staff, 35  
 Uteki Asks What Buddha Is,  
     67  
  
 Visible Trunk, Autumn Wind,  
     63  
  
 Walk in the Hills, A, 192  
 Washing the Bowl, 129  
 Where to Meet after Death, 18  
 Who Is He?, 155  
 Wooden Ball, The, 131  
  
 Yakusan Holds Zen, 160  
 Yakusan's Lake, 162  
 Yakusan's Lecture, 151  
 "You Are Sidetracked," 213  
  
 Zuigan Calls His Own Master,  
     31