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MUMONKAN

(Gateless Gate)

Main Cases, Mumon's Commentaries, Verses

Sanbo Zen Society

Signs in the footnotes:
 “A < B” = “A is a Dharma successor of B.”

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CASE 1: Jôshû's "Dog" ¹

Case:

A monk asked Master Jôshû², "Is there Buddha nature in a dog or not?"³ Jôshû said, "No [Mu]" ⁴."

Mumon's Commentary:

For the practice of Zen, you must pass the barriers of the Dharma Ancestors. To attain to marvelous realization, you must exhaust all paths of your mind and completely extinguish them. If you have not passed the barriers of the Dharma Ancestors and have not completely extinguished all paths of your mind, you are a phantom haunting the weeds and trees. Now just tell me, what are the barriers of the Dharma Ancestors? Merely this one word *Mu* – the one barrier of our school. So it has come to be called "the barrier of *Mu* gate⁵ of the Zen School."

Those who have passed the barrier are able not only to see Jôshû face to face but also to walk hand in hand with the whole descending line of Dharma Ancestors and be eyebrow to eyebrow with them. You see with the same eye that they see with, hear with the same ear that they hear with. Wouldn't it be a wonderful joy? Isn't there anyone who wants to pass this barrier?

Then throw your whole self into this *Mu*, making your whole body with its 360 bones and joints and 84,000 pores⁶ into a solid lump of desperate searching. Day and night, without ceasing, keep digging into it, but don't take it as "nothingness" or as "there is" or "there isn't." It must be like a red-hot iron ball which you have gulped down and which you try to vomit but cannot. You must extinguish all delusive thoughts and beliefs which you have cherished up to the present. After a certain period of such efforts, *Mu* comes to fruition, and inside and out become one naturally. You are then like a dumb man who has had a dream. You know yourself and for yourself only.

Then, all of a sudden, *it* breaks open. It astonishes the heavens and shakes the earth. It is just as if you had snatched the great sword of General Kan⁷: If you meet a Buddha, you kill him. If you meet a Dharma Ancestor, you kill him. Though you may stand on the brink of life and death, you enjoy the great freedom. In the six realms⁸ and the four modes of birth⁹, you live in the samadhi of innocent play.

Now, how should you work with *Mu*? Exhaust every ounce of your mental energy you have in doing it. And if you do not slacken off, you will be like a candle in front of the altar, which is lighted by one touch of fire.

Verse:

Dog – Buddha nature:

The complete presentation of the absolute command.

¹ Cf. Case 18 of the *Shoyoroku*.

² Jôshû Jûshin (778-897) < Nansen Fugan (748-835) < Baso Dôitsu < Nangaku Ejô.

³ Literal translation.

⁴ Literally this word means "No," "Nothing," "There is not..." etc.

⁵ "*Mu* gate" literally means "gateless, without gate."

⁶ I.e., the whole body.

⁷ Kan-U [*Guan Yu*], a famous hero (? ~220) in the times of the late Eastern Han dynasty (25-220) or the early Three Kingdoms (220-280).

⁸ The six realms of existence: hell, the world of hungry ghost, the world of beasts, the world of fighting spirits, the world of human beings, and the world of gods and devas.

⁹ The four types of birth of all living beings: viviparous, oviparous, from moisture, and metamorphic.

A little “there is” or “there isn’t”:
Body is lost, life is gone.

CASE 2: Hyakujō and the Fox ¹⁰

Case:

Whenever Master Hyakujō¹¹ delivered a sermon, an old man was always there listening with the monks. When they left, he left too. One day, however, he remained behind. The master asked him, “What man are you, standing in front of me?” The man replied, “Indeed, I am not a man. In the past, in the time of Kashyapa Buddha¹², I lived on this mountain as a priest. On one occasion a monk asked me, ‘Does a perfectly enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect or not?’ I answered, ‘He does not.’ Because of this answer, I fell into the state of a fox for 500 lives. Now, I beg you, Master, please say a turning word¹³ on my behalf and release me from the body of a fox.” Then he asked, “Does a perfectly enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect or not?” The master answered, “The law of cause and effect cannot be obscured.” Upon hearing this, the old man immediately became deeply enlightened. Making his bow, he said, “I have now been released from the old fox and will be behind the mountain. I dare to make a request of the Master. Please perform my funeral as you would for a deceased priest.”

The master had Ino¹⁴ strike the anvil¹⁵ with a gavel and announce to the monks that after the meal there would be a funeral service for a deceased priest. The monks wondered, saying, “All are healthy. No one is sick in the infirmary. What's this all about?” After the meal, the master led the monks to the foot of a rock behind the mountain and with his staff poked out the dead body of a fox. He then performed the ceremony of cremation.

That evening the master ascended the rostrum in the hall and told the monks the story. Ōbaku¹⁶ thereupon asked, “The man of old missed the turning word and fell to the state of a fox for 500 lives. Suppose every time he answered he made no mistakes, what would happen then?” The master said, “Just come nearer and I'll tell you.” Ōbaku then went up to the master and slapped him. The master clapped his hands and, laughing aloud, said, “I thought (only) the barbarian's beard was red¹⁷, but here is a(nother) barbarian with a red beard!”

Mumon's Commentary:

Not falling under the law of cause and effect - for what reason had he fallen into the state of a fox? The law of cause and effect cannot be obscured - for what reason has he been released

¹⁰ Cf. Case 8 of the *Shoyoroku*.

¹¹ Hyakujō Ekai (749-814) < Baso Dōitsu.

¹² Kashyapa Buddha is the sixth of the Seven Buddhas of Antiquity, Shakyamuni being the seventh. Here we may understand that “the time of Kashyapa Buddha” means long, long ago.

¹³ A turning word (*tengo*) is a word or phrase which has the power to turn delusions into enlightenment.

¹⁴ Ino (Chinese: *awei-na*; Sanskrit: *karmandana*) is an official position and title in a Zen monastery, being the monk in charge of rules, regulations, and the registry of monks.

¹⁵ In order to make an announcement in the temple, the monks often used a kind of wooden anvil [*byakutsui*], which was about 120 cm tall, cut octagonally, and made slimmer toward the top surface. A gavel, which was also cut in octagonal shape, was used to strike the center of the surface of the anvil hard after first moving it several times in a spiral on the anvil's surface.

¹⁶ Ōbaku Ki'un (? –850) < Hyakujō Ekai. Ōbaku was the master of Rinzai Gigen.

¹⁷ The image of Bodhidharma.

from a fox's body? If in regard to this you have the one eye, then you will understand that the former Hyakujô enjoyed 500 lives of grace as a fox.

Verse:

Not falling – not obscuring:

Two faces, one die¹⁸.

Not obscuring – not falling:

A thousands mistakes, ten thousand mistakes.

CASE 3: Gutei's One Finger ¹⁹

Case:

Whenever he was asked a (serious) question, Master Gutei²⁰ simply raised one finger.

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

When Gutei was about to die, he said to the assembled monks, “I received this one-finger Zen from Tenryû²¹. I've used it all my life, but have not exhausted it.” Having said this, he entered nirvana.

Mumon's Commentary:

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

Verse:

Old Tenryû made a fool of Gutei,

¹⁸ A block of wood, plastic etc. with a different number of spots on each side, used in games (pl.: dice).

¹⁹ Cf. Case 19 of the *Hekiganroku*; Case 84 of the *Shoyoroku*.

²⁰ Gutei's real name and historical dates are unknown; he was called “Gutei” because he always recited *Gutei Butsumo Dharani*. Most probably a contemporary of Ōbaku Ki'un (?-850) and Rinzai Gigen (?-866/867). Gutei (?-?) < Kôshû Tenryû (?-?) < Daibai Hôjô (752-839) < Baso Dôitsu.

²¹ There is a famous story behind this line: Gutei was a serious practitioner of Zen but remained unenlightened for a long time. One day a traveling nun appeared Gutei's living quarter. She walked around his seat three times, as was customary for a guest to greet a host, but without taking off her bamboo hat, she stood in front of him and said, “If you can say a word that satisfies me, I'll take off my bamboo hat and make a deep bow.” Gutei could say nothing. The nun challenged him three times and still Gutei could not answer. As she was about to leave, Gutei kindly said, “It's already dark. Why don't you stay in this temple for the night?” The nun replied, “If you can say something, I'll stay.” Again, Gutei could utter nothing. After the nun had left, Gutei was deeply ashamed of himself and made up his mind to start on a journey to search for a true master who could severely train him. In the last night in his temple, he had a strange dream: The local deity came up and said, “Don't leave. Very soon an incarnated bodhisattva will show up and teach you the true Dharma.” Sure enough, the next day Master Tenryû came to his temple. Gutei treated him with great respect and told him about the story with the nun and his decision to leave the temple. After hearing this, Tenryû stuck up one finger. At that moment, Gutei had a great enlightenment.

Nothing is known about Master Tenryû either, except for the following *mondo* (questions-and-answer exchange) held between a monk and him: A monk asked, “How can I get out of the three worlds?” [In Buddhist philosophy, the three delusive worlds are those of desire, form, and no-form] Master Tenryû said, “Where are you right now?”

Who cut the boy with a sharp blade.²²
The mountain deity of Korei²³ easily raised his hand,
And tore Mt. Ka, with its ten thousand ridges, in two.²⁴

CASE 4: The Barbarian Has No Beard

Case:

Wakuan²⁵ said, “Why does the barbarian from the West²⁶ have no beard?”

Mumon's Commentary:

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

Verse:

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

CASE 5: Kyôgen's Man Up a Tree

Case:

Master Kyôgen²⁷ said, “It's like a man up the tree, hanging from a branch by his moth; his hands cannot grasp a branch, his feet won't reach a bough. Suppose there is another man

²² It is possible to translate the first two lines as follows: “Gutei made a fool of old Tenryû; he cut the boy with a sharp blade.”

²³ Literally: “giant Spirit.”

²⁴ The last two lines are quoted in *Hekiganroku* 32 (Verse).

²⁵ Wakuan Shitai (1108-1179) < Shian Keigen < Engo Kokugon (in the Yôgi Line of the Rinzaï School).

²⁶ I.e., Bodhidharma, who is always depicted with a thick beard.

²⁷ Kyôgen Chikan (?-898) < Isan Reiyû < Hyakujô Ekai < Baso Dôitsu < Nangaku Ejô.

The episode of Kyôgen's great enlightenment is well-known: Kyôgen was a very intelligent and learned man, but he did not come to enlightenment early. His master Isan, knowing his situation, said to Kyôgen one day, “What is your essential face before your father and mother were born?” Kyôgen could not answer on the spot, so he went back to his books to check. He searched through all his books, sutras, and research notes for a sentence or passage he could use as an answer, but not one satisfied him. Finally, he went to Master Isan and said, “I don't know the answer. Please tell me what it is.” “It would not be difficult for me to tell you, but if I did you would doubtless reproach me later,” the master replied. In great despair Kyôgen burned all his books and notes. Losing all hope of ever coming to a true knowledge of Buddha Way in this life, he vowed to spend the rest of his days seeking peace of mind in manual labor. He retired to a hut in Nan'yo, where the National Teacher Echû had once lived in a hermitage. One day, as he was clearing the pathway, a pebble bounced off the tip of his broom and resounded against a bamboo tree. Hearing the sound, Kyôgen suddenly experienced great enlightenment. He returned to his hut and prostrated himself in the direction in which Isan lived, saying, “Master, your kindness is far deeper than that of my parents. If you had explained these things to me at that time, I would never have had this wonderful joy.”

under the tree who asks him, 'What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the west?' If he does not respond, he goes against the wish of the questioner. If he answers, he will lose his life. At such a time, how should he respond?"

Mumon's Commentary:

Even if your eloquence flows like a river, it is of no use. Even if you can expound the whole body of the sutras, it is of no avail. If you can respond to it fittingly, you will give life to those who have been dead, and put to death those who have been alive. If, however, you are unable to do this, wait for Maitreya²⁸ to come and ask him.

Verse:

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

CASE 6: Buddha Holds Up a Flower ²⁹

Case:

Once in ancient times, when the World-Honored One³⁰ was at Mt. Vulture³¹, he held up a flower, turned it around, and showed it to the assemblage. At this, they all remained silent. Only the venerable Kashyapa³² broke into a smile. The World-Honored One said: "I have 'the Treasury of the Eye of Truth and Dharma,'³³ 'the marvelous heart-mind of nirvana,' 'the true form of no-form,' 'the wonderful and subtle gate of the Dharma.' It does not depend on letters, being specially transmitted outside all teachings. Now I entrust Mahakashyapa with this."

Mumon's Commentary:

The golden-faced Gautama insolently suppressed noble people and made them lowly. He sells dog's flesh under the label of sheep's head. I thought there should be something of particular merit in it. If at that time, however, all those attending had smiled, how would "the Treasury of the Eye of Truth and Dharma" have been transmitted? Or if Kashyapa had not smiled, how would he have been entrusted with it? If you say that "the Treasury of the Eye of Truth and Dharma" can be transmitted, then that is as if the golden-faced old man is swindling country people at the town gate. If you say it cannot be transmitted, then why did Buddha say he entrusted only

²⁸ A bodhisattva who is supposed to come to the world as a new Buddha 5,670,000,000 years after the death of Shakyamuni.

²⁹ Cf. *Denkoroku* Chap. 1.

³⁰ Shakyamuni Buddha (463-383 BCE, after a general supposition).

³¹ Mt. Vulture, or Mt. Grdhrakûta, where Shakyamuni Buddha preached, is located near the capital of Magada in ancient India.

³² The venerable Kashyapa, more exactly Mahakashyapa, was one of the ten greatest disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha. Born as a Brahman, he became the only successor of the Buddha according to the Zen tradition. After Shakyamuni's death he became the top of the Buddhist community. He is considered to be the First Dharma Ancestor, famous for his personal, life-long and extremely strict ascetism.

³³ *Shôbôgenzô*.

Kashyapa with it?

Verse:

In handling a flower,
The tail of the snake already manifests itself.
Kashyapa breaks into a smile,
Nobody on earth or in heaven knows what to do.

CASE 7: Jôshû's "Wash the Bowls" ³⁴

Case:

A monk asked Jôshû³⁵, "I have just entered this monastery. I beg you, Master, please give me instructions." Jôshû said, "Have you eaten the rice gruel yet or not?" The monk answered, "Yes, I have eaten the rice gruel." Jôshû said, "Wash the bowls." The monk attained some realization.

Mumon's Commentary:

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

Verse:

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

CASE 8: Keichû Makes Carts

Case:

Master Gettan³⁶ asked a monk, "Keichû³⁷ made a hundred carts. If he took off both wheels and removed the axle, what would he make clear about the cart?"

Mumon's Commentary:

If you can realize this at once, your eye will be a shooting star and your spiritual activity like caching lightning.

Verse:

Where the active wheel revolves,
Even the master³⁸ is bewildered.

³⁴ Cf. Case 39 of the *Shoyoroku*.

³⁵ Jôshû Jûshin (778-897) < Nansen Fugan < Baso Dôitsu < Nangaku Ejô.

³⁶ Gettan Zenka (1079-1152) < Kaifuku Dônen < Goso Hôen < Haku'un Shutân < Yôgi Hôe (Rinzai-Line)..

³⁷ A legendary cart master in the ancient kingdom of Xia (about 2070 BCE-1600 BCE).

³⁸ Or: "skilled person."

It moves in four directions: above and below,
South and north, east and west.

CASE 9: Daitsû-Chishô Buddha

Case:

Once a monk asked Master Jô of Kôyô³⁹, “Daitsû-Chishô Buddha⁴⁰ sat in the meditation hall for ten kalpas, but the Dharma of the Buddha did not manifest itself and he could not become Buddha⁴¹. Why was this?” Jô replied, “Your question is fitting indeed.” The monk said, “He sat in zazen in the meditation hall. Why couldn’t he become Buddha?” Jô said, “Because he is the Buddha of Non-Becoming⁴².”

Mumon's Commentary:

I approve the old barbarian's realization⁴³, but I don't approve the old barbarian's understanding. When an ordinary person has realized it, he is a saint. If a saint understands it, he is an ordinary person.

Verse:

Far better than realizing the body is to realize the heart-mind and be at peace.
If the heart-mind is fully realized, there is no anxiety about the body;
If both body and heart-mind are completely realized,
A holy hermit does not wish to be appointed lord.

CASE 10: Seizei, Alone and Poor

Case:

A monk, Seizei⁴⁴, asked Master Sôzan⁴⁵, “Seizei is alone and poor. I beseech you, Master, help me out with some alms.” San said, “Venerable⁴⁶ Zei!” “Yes, Master!” replied Zei. San said, “You have already drunk three cups of fine Hakka wine from Seigen⁴⁷ and still you say that you have not yet moistened your lips?⁴⁸”

³⁹ Kôyô Seijô (?-?) < Bashô Esei (?-?) < Nantô Kôyû (850-938) < Kyôzan Ejaku < Isan Reiyû.

⁴⁰ In the Lotus Sutra there is a parable about a magical city, where, in the endlessly distant past, Daitsû-Chishô was the king of a certain country. He had sixteen sons at the time when he forsake the world and family and entered priesthood. When he experienced complete enlightenment, he began to preach the Dharma in a mountain area. Upon hearing their father's preaching, all sixteen sons also entered priesthood. Each of the sixteen princes eventually became a Buddha, the youngest being Shakyamuni Buddha himself. *Daitsû* means “greatly communicated or penetrated”; *Chishô* means “Wisdom (is) excellent.”

⁴¹ Literally: “... he did not attain the way to become Buddha.”

⁴² Or: “a non-becoming Buddha.”

⁴³ *Chi*: knowing (through realizing the Essence).

⁴⁴ Exact dates unknown. In the Soto Line.

⁴⁵ Sôzan Honjaku (840-901) < Tôzan Ryôkai (Founder of the Soto School).

⁴⁶ “Venerable” is used here to translate *shari* [*ajari* in full form, *Acarya* in Sanskrit], an honorific title for a monk who leads disciples, correcting their manners and deeds.

⁴⁷ *Hakka* means “Family (business) Haku”, well-known for its excellent wine. *Seigen* is a place name.

⁴⁸ Or: “.... moistened your lips.”

Mumon's Commentary:

Seizei is obsequious in tone but what is his real intention? Sôzan has the penetrating eye and thoroughly discerns the coming monk. Be that as it may, just tell me, where and how has Venerable Zei drunk the wine?

Verse:

Poor like Hantan⁴⁹,
Of a spirit like Kôu⁵⁰,
Though they cannot sustain themselves,
They dare to compete with each other for wealth.

CASE 11: Jôshû Examines the Hermits

Case:

Jôshû⁵¹ went to a hermit's hut and asked, "Anybody there? Anything there⁵²?" The hermit thrust up his fist. Jôshû said, "The water is too shallow for a ship to anchor." Thereupon he left.

Again he went to a hermit's hut and asked, "Anybody there? Anything there?" The hermit, too, thrust up his fist. Jôshû said, "Freely you give, freely you take away. Freely you kill, freely you give life." He made a profound bow.

Mumon's Commentary:

Each hermit thrust up his fist the same way. Why is one accepted and the other rejected? Tell me, what is the cause of the confusion? If on this point you say a turning word, then you can see that Jôshû's tongue has no bone. Now he raises up, now he thrusts up in perfect freedom. But though this is so, it is also true that Jôshû himself has been seen through by the two hermits. Furthermore, if you can say that there is a distinction of superiority and inferiority between the two hermits, you have not yet the eye of realization. Neither have you the eye of realization if you say there is no distinction of superiority and inferiority between them.

Verse:

The eye is a shooting star,
The activity like lightning;
A sword that kills,
A sword that gives life.

CASE 12: Zuigan Calls Himself "Master"

Case:

⁴⁹ A man in the era of the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 CE); he lived in extreme poverty.

⁵⁰ A famous war hero (232-202 BCE), who rivaled with Ryûhō, the founder of the Han dynasty.

⁵¹ Jôshû Jûshin (778-897) < Nansen Fugan < Baso Dôitsu < Nangaku Ejô.

⁵² Jpn: *Ariya ariya*. Literally: "Is there (anybody or anything)? Is there (anybody or anything)?"

Every day Master Zuigan⁵³ used to call to himself, “Master⁵⁴!” and would answer, “Yes!” Again, he would call, “Thoroughly awake! Thoroughly awake!” and he would answer, “Yes! Yes!” “Don’t be deceived by others, any day or any time.” “No! No!”

Mumon's Commentary:

Old Zuigan himself buys and sells. He has many puppet gods and devils with which he plays. But why? Look! One is calling. One is answering. One keeps awake. One is not deceived by others. But if you get stuck there, that's not it. If you were to imitate Zuigan, it would be the understanding of a fox.

Verse:

The reason those who learn the Way don't realize the truth
Is simply that they perceive the discerning spirit they've had all along.
It is the origin of endless life and death;
Fools take it for the essential self.⁵⁵

CASE 13: Tokusan Carries His Bowl ⁵⁶

Case:

One day Tokusan⁵⁷ came down to the hall carrying his bowls. Seppô⁵⁸ asked him, “Old Master, the bell has not yet rung nor the drum sounded. Where are you going with your bowls?” Thereupon Tokusan went back to his room.

Seppô told this to Gantô⁵⁹. Gantô said, “Great Tokusan though he is, he has not yet realized the last word⁶⁰.” Hearing of this, Tokusan sent his attendant to call Gantô and then asked him, “Don't you approve of this old monk?” Gantô secretly whispered his intention. Tokusan remained silent. Sure enough, the next day when Tokusan ascended the rostrum, his talk was quite different from usual. Gantô went to the front of the Zen hall and rubbing his hands together, laughed loudly and said, “Wonderful! How happy I am that our Old Man could realize the last word. From now on he'll be subject to no one under heaven.”

Mumon's Commentary:

As for the last word, neither Gantô nor Tokusan have ever heard it, even in a dream. When I examine this point, I find they are just puppets on a shelf.

Verse:

If you grasp the first word,

⁵³ Zuigan Shigen (?-?) < Gantô Zenkatsu (828-887) < Tokusan Senkan.

⁵⁴ Or: “my true self” [*shujinkô*].

⁵⁵ This verse is a quote from the saying of Master Chôsa Keishin (? -868).

⁵⁶ Cf. Case 55 of the *Shoyoroku*.

⁵⁷ Tokusan Senkan (780/782? -865) < Ryûtan Sôshin (?-?) < Tennô Dôgo (748-807) < Sekitô Kisen < Seigen Gyôshi.

⁵⁸ Seppô Gison (822-908) < Tokusan Senkan.

⁵⁹ Gantô Zenkatsu (828-887) < Tokusan Senkan. Gantô was younger than Seppô, but much more advanced in the practice of Zen than the latter.

⁶⁰ *Matsugo-no-ku*, “the very last word.” Literally it means the word(s) that a person utters immediately before dying.

You will realize the last word.
The last word and the first word:
It's not this one word.

CASE 14: Nansen Kills the Cat ⁶¹

Case:

Once the monk of the eastern and western Zen halls in Master Nansen's⁶² temple were quarrelling about a cat. Nansen held up the cat and said, "You monks! If one of you can say a word, I will spare the cat. If you can't say anything, I will put it to the sword." No one could answer, so Nansen finally slew it.

In the evening when Jôshû⁶³ returned, Nansen told him what had happened. Jôshû thereupon took off his sandals, put them on his head, and walked off. Nansen said, "If you had been there, I could have spared the cat."

Mumon's Commentary:

What is the meaning of Jôshû's putting his sandals on his head? If you can give a turning word concerning this matter, you will be able to see that Nansen's command was not meaningless. But if you can't, look out! Danger!

Verse:

Had Jôshû been there,
He would have given the command instead;
Had he snatched away the sword,
Even Nansen would have begged for his life.

CASE 15: Tôzan's Sixty Blows

Case:

When Tôzan⁶⁴ came to Ummon⁶⁵ for instruction, Ummon asked, "Where have you come from?" Tôzan said, "From Sato." Ummon said, "Where were you during the summer retreat?" Tôzan said, "At Hôzu Monastery, south of the lake." Ummon said, "When did you leave there?" Tôzan said, "On the twenty-fifth of August." Ummon said, "I spare you sixty blows."

The next day Tôzan came up to Ummon and asked, "Yesterday you spared me sixty blows though I deserved them. I beg you, sir, where was I at fault?" Ummon said, "Oh, you rice bag! Have you been wandering about like that, now west of the river, now south of the lake?" At this, Tôzan had great realization.

⁶¹ Cf. Cases 63 and 64 of the *Hekiganroku*; Case 9 of the *Shoyoroku*.

⁶² Nansen Fugan (748-835) < Baso Dôitsu < Nangaku Ejô.

⁶³ Jôshû Jûshin (778-897) < Nansen Fugan < Baso Dôitsu < Nangaku Ejô.

⁶⁴ Tôzan Shuso (910-990; < Ummon Bun'en), not Tôzan Ryôkai (807-869, founder of the Sôtô-School).

⁶⁵ Ummon Bun'en (864-949) < Seppô Gison < Tokusan Senkan < ... < Seigen Gyôshi. The founder of the Ummon School.

Mumon's Commentary:

At that time, if Ummon had given Tôzan the essential food of Zen and awakened him to an active Zen spirit, his family gate would not have become so desolate. Tôzan struggled with himself in agony all through the night and at daybreak came to Ummon again. Ummon gave him a further push to break through. Although Tôzan attained realization immediately, he still could not be called bright. Now I ask you, does Tôzan deserve sixty blows with the stick or not? If you say he does, then all the trees, grasses, thickets, and groves should be beaten. If you say he does not, then Ummon is telling a lie. If you grasp this clearly, you are breathing through one mouth with Tôzan.

Verse:

The lion has a puzzling way of teaching its cubs⁶⁶;
The cubs crouch, leap and spring back swiftly;
Unintentionally, he gave a checkmate again,
The former arrow was light, but the latter went deep.

CASE 16: The Sound of the Bell and the Seven-Panel Robe

Case:

Ummon⁶⁷ said, "The world is vast and wide like this. Why do we put on our seven-panel robe⁶⁸ at the sound of the bell?"

Mumon's Commentary:

Generally speaking, in practicing and studying Zen, it is most detestable to follow sounds and pursue colors. Even though you may become enlightened through hearing sounds and come to realize mind by seeing colors, that is the ordinary way of things. People do not know that for real Zen monks, when they are riding on sounds and becoming one with colors, everything is clear, moment by moment, everything is full of wonder, action after action. When you hear a sound, however, just tell me, does the sound come to the ear or the ear go to the sound? Even though you have extinguished both sound and silence, what will you realize here? If you hear with the ear, you cannot realize it. When you hear with the eye, for the first time it will become intimate.

Verse:

With realization, all things are of one family;
Without realization, everything is separate and different;
Without realization, all things are of one family;

⁶⁶ It is said that the lion dares to kick her cubs off the cliff, ready to raise only those which climb up the cliff back to their mother by themselves.

⁶⁷ Ummon Bun'en (864-949) < Seppô Gison < Tokusan Senkan < ... < Seigen Gyôshi. The founder of the Ummon School.

⁶⁸ This "robe" [*kesa*] is an outer coat worn by regular Buddhist priests for daily activities or on ceremonial occasions. "The seven-panel" *kesa* is a dress worn for minor ceremonies. *Kesa* with nine to twenty-five panels are for full-dress occasions.

With realization, everything is separate and different.

CASE 17: The National Teacher's Three Calls

Case:

The National Teacher⁶⁹ called his attendant three times, and three times his attendant responded. The National Teacher said, “I thought I was standing alone with my back to you⁷⁰, but now I find that you are standing alone with your back to me.”

Mumon's Commentary:

The National Teacher called three times and his tongue dropped to the ground. The attendant responded three times, emitting the answer with light. The National Teacher was old and lonely. He held the cow's head and forced it to eat grass. The attendant would have none of it; delicious food has little attraction for a man who has had enough to eat. Just tell me, where are they standing alone with their backs to each other? When the country is prosperous, persons of talent are esteemed; children of rich families are too proud to eat plain food.

Verse:

We must carry an iron yoke with no hole,
It is not a slight matter, the curse would be passed on to our descendants;
If you want to support the gate and sustain the house,
You must climb a mountain of swords with bare feet.

CASE 18: Tôzan's “Three Pounds’ Flax” ⁷¹

Case:

A monk asked Master Tôzan⁷², “What is Buddha?” Tôzan said, “Three pounds’ flax [*Masagin*]⁷³.”

Mumon's Commentary:

Old Tôzan realized a bit of clam Zen. Slightly opening the two halves of the shell, he exposed his liver and intestines. This may be so, but tell me, where do you see Tôzan?

Verse:

“Three pounds’ flax [*Masagin*]” juts forth.
The words are intimate and the intent is even more intimate.
A person who speaks about right and wrong
Is a person of right and wrong.

⁶⁹ Nan'yô Echû (? -775) < Sixth Ancestor Enô.

⁷⁰ Literally: “I thought I was rebellious against you.”

⁷¹ Cf. Case 12 of the *Hekiganroku*.

⁷² Tôzan Shuso (910-990; < Ummon Bun'en), not Tôzan Ryôkai (807-869, founder of the Sôtô-School).

⁷³ Or *Masagin*, as in all Rinzai texts. At any rate, the word means literally: “Three pounds of flax or hemp.”

CASE 19: Ordinary Mind Is the Way

Case:

Jôshû asked Nansen⁷⁴, “What is the Way?” Nansen said, “The ordinary mind⁷⁵ is the Way⁷⁶.” Jôshû said, “Should I direct myself toward it or not?” Nansen said, “If you try to turn toward it, you go against it.” Jôshû said, “If I do not try to turn toward it, how can I know that it is the Way?” Nansen said, “The Way does not belong to knowing or not-knowing. Knowing is delusion; not-knowing is a blank consciousness. When you have really reached the true Way beyond all doubt, you will find it as vast and boundless as the great empty firmament. How can it be talked about on a level of right and wrong?” At these words, Jôshû was suddenly enlightened.

Mumon's Commentary:

Nansen was asked a question by Jôshû, and Nansen's base was shattered and melted away. He could not justify himself. Even though Jôshû has come to realization, he will have to delve into it for another thirty years before he can realize it fully.

Verse:

The spring flowers, the moon in autumn,
The cool breezes of summer, the winter's snow;
If idle concerns do not cloud the mind,
This is a person's happiest season.

CASE 20: A Person of Great Strength ⁷⁷

Case:

Master Shôgen⁷⁸ said, “Why is it that a person of great strength does not lift up his or her leg?” He also said, “It is not with the tongue that we speak.”

Mumon's Commentary:

It should be said that Shôgen poured out all that he had in his intestines and belly. But there is nobody who can recognize this. However, even someone who realized this immediately would be given a bitter blow by me. Why? Look! If you want to know whether it is pure gold or not, you must look at it in the midst of fire.

Verse:

Raising a leg, I upturn the Scented Ocean;

⁷⁴ Jôshû Jûshin (778-897) < Nansen Fugan < Baso Dôitsu < Nangaku Ejô.

⁷⁵ *Byôjôshin*, with the background nuance of “the permanently [*jô*]/peaceful [*byô*]/mind [*shin*].”

⁷⁶ This sentence itself comes from Great Master Ba (cf. *Baso-Goroku* [Collection of the Sayings of Baso]).

⁷⁷ Cf. *Miscellaneous Koans* 15a.b.

⁷⁸ Shôgen Sûgaku (1132-1202) < Mitsuan Iketsu (Yôgi Line of the Rinzai School). All present-day Rinzai lines come from Master Shôgen.

Lowering my head, I look down on the four dhyana heavens⁷⁹.
This whole body can't be placed anywhere.
Please finish this poem in your own words.

CASE 21: Ummon's "Shit-Stick"

Case:

A monk asked Ummon⁸⁰, "What is Buddha?" Ummon said, "Shit-Stick [*Kanshiketsu*]⁸¹."

Mumon's Commentary:

It should be said of Ummon that he was too poor to prepare even the plainest food and too busy to write a draft. Suddenly he took up the shit-stick to support the gate (of the Buddha Way). You can see how the Dharma has grown and decayed.

Verse:

The flash of lightning,
The spark of a flint,
A moment's blinking:
It's already gone.

CASE 22: Kashyapa's Flagpole⁸²

Case

Ananda⁸³ asked Kashyapa⁸⁴, "The world-Honored One transmitted the brocade robe to you. What else did he transmit to you?" Kashyapa called, "Ananda!" Ananda replied, "Yes, Master." Kashyapa said, "Knock down the flagpole at the gate⁸⁵."

Mumon's Commentary:

If you can give a turning word befitting this, you will see that the meeting at Mt. Grdhrakûta⁸⁶ is definitely still in session. If not, it is because *Vipashyin* Buddha⁸⁷ has keeping

⁷⁹ The four heavens in the World of Phenomena [*shiki-kai*, one of the Three Worlds], which only those who practiced Zen amid the World of Desires [*yoku-kai*] are allowed to climb up to.

⁸⁰ Ummon Bun'en (864-949) < Seppô Gison < Tokusan Senkan < ... < Seigen Gyôshi. The founder of the Ummon School.

⁸¹ *Kanshiketsu* is traditionally interpreted as "shit-stick": a dry spoon-formed stick used in old times in the restroom. However, modern text research found out that this expression means dried stick-like piece of excrement itself.

⁸² This is the story of Dharma transmission from Kashyapa, the First Ancestor to Ananda, the Second Ancestor. Cf. *Denkoroku* Chap. 2.

⁸³ The long-term attendant of Shakyamuni and the Second Ancestor of Zen in India after the First Ancestor Kashyapa.

⁸⁴ The First Ancestor of Zen in India after Shakyamuni Buddha.

⁸⁵ A flag was raised on the pole at the gate when a sermon was being preached or when a Dharma combat was in progress. "Knock down the flag pole" means that the sermon or the Dharma combat is over.

⁸⁶ Mt. Grdhrakûta, or Vulture Peak, where Shakyamuni Buddha preached, is located near the capital of Magada in ancient India.

⁸⁷ The first of the Seven Buddhas preceding Shakyamuni.

something in mind from the remotest times, and even now he still cannot attain the mystery.

Verse:

The answer is more familiar than the question;

How many discuss this with glaring eyes!

Elder brother calls, younger brother answers - the family disgrace!

Here is the spring that belongs to neither *yin* nor *yang*.

CASE 23: Think Neither Good Nor Evil

Case⁸⁸:

The Sixth Ancestor⁸⁹ was once pursued by the monk Myô⁹⁰ as far as Mt. Daiyu. The Ancestor, seeing Myô coming, laid the robe and bowl on a rock and said, “This robe represents the faith. How can it be competed for by force? I will allow you to take it away.” Myô tried to lift it up, but it was as immovable as a mountain. Myô was terrified and trembled with awe. He said, “I came for the Dharma, not the robe. I beg you, lay brother, please reveal it to me.” The Ancestor said, “Not thinking good or evil: at that very moment, what is the primal face of Monk Myô?” In that instant, Myô suddenly attained deep realization, and his whole body was covered with sweat. In tears, he bowed and said, “Besides the secret⁹¹ words and secret meaning you have just revealed to me, is there anything else deeper yet?” The Ancestor said, “What I have preached to you is no secret at all. If you reflect on your own true face, the secret will be found with yourself.” Myô said, “Though I have been at Ôbai⁹² with the other monks, I have never realized what my true self is. Now, thanks to your instruction, I know it is like a man who drinks water and knows for himself whether it is cold or warm. Now you, lay brother, are my master.” The Ancestor said, “If that is the way you feel, let us both have Ôbai for our master. Be mindful and hold fast to what you have realized.”

Mumon's Commentary:

It should be said of the Sixth Ancestor that his action sprang from urgent circumstances. His kindness is like that of a grandmother who peels a fresh litchi, removes the seed, and puts it into your mouth so that all you have to do is swallow it.

Verse:

⁸⁸ There is a preceding story behind the koan: The Sixth Ancestor Enô (637-713), when he was young, sought out the Fifth Ancestor Ôbai. Ôbai immediately recognized that Enô was a person of extraordinary caliber. At that time, Ôbai was considering who of his seven hundred monks would become his Dharma successor. In a “poetry” competition it became clear that Enô was the only winner for the successor. One night the Fifth Ancestor gave Enô robe and bowl as a token of the Dharma transmission and made him leave the temple, saying, “You are still young. Remain hidden for at least ten years.” When it soon became clear in the temple that the Dharma “went away” and the young Enô was absent, some monks immediately set out to catch him and retrieve the robe and Dharma. The monk Myô, a former general, pursued Enô far to the Daiyû mountain, where he finally reached him. The koan starts there.

⁸⁹ Daikan Enô (638-713).

⁹⁰ Môzan Emyô (auch: Dômyô, ?-?) < Fifth Ancestor.

⁹¹ The word “secret” here has a deep connotation of being “intimate.”

⁹² Mount Ôbai. I.e., the Fifth Ancestor Kônin (601-674), who lived there.

It can't be described! It can't be pictured!
It can't be sufficiently praised! Stop trying to grasp it with your head!
The primal face – there is nowhere to hide it;
Even when the world is destroyed, it is indestructible.

CASE 24: Leaving Speech and Silence Behind

Case:

A monk asked Master Fuketsu⁹³, “Both speech and silence are concerned with *ri*⁹⁴ and *bi*⁹⁵. How can we transcend them?” Fuketsu said, “I constantly think of Kōnan in March, where partridges are chirping among hundreds of fragrant blossoms.”⁹⁶

Mumon's Commentary:

Fuketsu's activity of mind is like lightening. He gains the road and immediately walks along. But why does he rest upon the tip of the ancient one's tongue and not cut it off? If you realize this deeply, a way will be found naturally. Just leave all words behind and say one phrase.

Verse:

Before her utters the wonderfully lyrical verse⁹⁷,
Before he says anything – it is already manifested.
If you go chattering glibly,
You should be ashamed of yourself.

CASE 25: The Sermon of the Third Seat ⁹⁸

Case:

Master Kyōzan⁹⁹ went to Maitreya¹⁰⁰'s abode in a dream and was led to the third seat. A venerable monk struck the wooden anvil with a gavel and said, “Today the third seat is due to speak.” Kyōzan stood up, struck the wooden anvil with the gavel, and said, “The Dharma of Mahayana is beyond the four propositions and transcends the hundred negations. Listen! Listen!”

Mumon's Commentary:

Just say, did he preach or did he not? If you open your mouth, you miss. If you shut your mouth, you miss too. Even if you neither open nor shut your mouth, it is a hundred and eight

⁹³ Fuketsu Enshō (896-973) < Nan'in Egyō (Rinzai School). Fuketsu was a 4th generation descendent after Rinzai.

⁹⁴ Literally: “to leave, to be apart from something, apart-ness, away-ness.” It means a dimension akin to the “essential world.”

⁹⁵ Literally: “subtlety, subtleness.” It means emerging in “subtle” reality (-ties) on the phenomenal level.

⁹⁶ Originally a verse composed by the poet Toho (712-770).h

⁹⁷ According to the modern researches, *Fukotsu no ku* means the highly lyrical quality of the poem after the classical style.

⁹⁸ Cf. Case 90 of the *Shoyoroku*.

⁹⁹ Kyōzan Ejaku (804-890) < Isan Reiyū. Kyōzan was a co-founder of the Igyō School with Isan.

¹⁰⁰ See Case 5.

thousand miles away.

Verse:

The broad daylight, the blue sky – .
He speaks of a dream in a dream;
Suspicious! Suspicious!
He is trying to deceive the whole assembly.

CASE 26: Two Monks Roll Up the Blinds ¹⁰¹

Case:

A monk once went to Daihōgen¹⁰² of Seiryō¹⁰³ before the midday meal to ask for instruction. Hōgen pointed to the bamboo blinds with his hand. At that moment, two monks who were there went over to the blinds and rolled them up in the same manner. Hōgen said, “One gain, one loss.”¹⁰⁴

Mumon's Commentary:

Just tell me, which one has gained and which one has lost? If you have one eye opened concerning this point, you will know where National Teacher Seiryō failed. Nevertheless, you should not inquire into this problem in connection with gain or loss.

Verse:

The blind being rolled up, bright clarity penetrates the great empty space.
Yet the great empty space still does not match the principle of our school;
It is far better to throw away emptiness and everything completely,
And to come to the point where, with a tight fit, no wind ever passes through.

CASE 27: This Isn't a Thing¹⁰⁵

Case:

A monk asked Master Nansen¹⁰⁶, “Is there any Dharma that has not been preached to the people?” Nansen said, “There is.” The monk said, “What is the Dharma which has never been preached to the people?” Nansen said, “This isn't mind; this isn't Buddha; this isn't a thing.”

Mumon's Commentary:

Nansen was merely asked a question, and he exhausted all his possessions at once and

¹⁰¹ Cf. Case 27 of the *Shoyoroku*.

¹⁰² Hōgen Mon'eki (885-958) < Rakan Keichin < ... < Seppō Gison. The founder of the Hōgen School. “Dai(hōgen)” means “great Hōgen.”

¹⁰³ Or „Shōryō.” The name of the temple where Hōgen lived.

¹⁰⁴ Or: “One gains, one loses” [*Ittoku, isshitsu*].

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Case 28a of the *Hekiganroku*.

¹⁰⁶ Nansen Fugan (748-835) < Baso Dōitsu < Nangaku Ejō.

was brought to naught.

Verse:

Speaking too much degrades virtue,
No-words is truly effective;
Even though the great ocean should change,
It can never be communicated to you.

CASE 28: Ryûtan's Name Echoed Long

Case:

One day Tokusan¹⁰⁷ kept asking Ryûtan¹⁰⁸ for instruction till nightfall. Ryûtan finally said, "The night is late. Why don't you go to bed?" Tokusan thanked him, made his bows, raised the door curtain and left. Seeing how dark the night was, he turned back and said, "It's pitch black outside." Ryûtan lit a lantern and handed it to Tokusan. Just as Tokusan reached for it, Ryûtan blew it out. At that Tokusan came to sudden realization and made a deep bow. Ryûtan asked, "What have you realized?" Tokusan replied, "From now on, I will not doubt the words of the old master who is renowned everywhere under the sun."

The following day Ryûtan ascended the rostrum and declared, "There is a man among you whose fangs are like trees of swords and whose mouth is like a bowl of blood. Strike him and he won't turn his head. Someday he will settle on the top of an isolated peak and establish my Way there."

Tokusan brought his sutra commentaries and notes to the front of the hall, held up a torch and said, "Even if you have exhausted abstruse doctrine, it is like placing a hair in vast space. Even if you have learned the vital points of all the truths in the world, it is like a drop of water thrown into a big ravine." He then burned all his commentaries and notes. After making his bows, he left.

Mumon's Commentary:

Before Tokusan had crossed the border, his mind was full of resentment and his mouth speechless with anger. He wanted to go the way south, intending to refute the doctrine of the special transmission outside the sutras.

When he got to the road to the province of Rei, he asked an old woman if he could buy a *tenjin*¹⁰⁹ from her. The old woman said, "Your Reverence, what are all those books you are carrying in the cart?" Tokusan said, "Those are commentaries on the Diamond Sutra." The old woman, "In that sutra, it says the past mind can't be caught; the present mind can't be caught; the future mind can't be caught. Your Reverence, with which mind are you going to take the *tenjin*?" This one question tightly shuts Tokusan's mouth, but hearing the old woman's words, he still did not completely die away. He asked her, "Is there a Zen master near here?" She replied, "Master Ryûtan

¹⁰⁷ Tokusan Senkan (780/782? -865) < Ryûtan Sôshin (?-?) < Tennô Dôgo (748-807) < Sekitô Kisen < Seigen Gyôshi. Our present Case 28 recounts how he came to his great enlightenment, while Case 13 makes Tokusan in his late years visible.

¹⁰⁸ Ryûtan Sôshin (?-?) < Tennô Dôgo (748-807) < Sekitô Kisen < Seigen Gyôshi.

¹⁰⁹ A light meal.

lives about five *ri*¹¹⁰ away.”

After Tokusan arrived at Ryûtan's, he was entirely defeated. It must be said that his former and latter words are not consistent. It seems that Ryûtan, forgetting his own unsightliness, took too much pity on Tokusan. Seeing a live charcoal in Tokusan, he immediately threw muddy water over his head to extinguish it. Looking at the whole affair coolly, I think it is just a farce.

Verse:

Seeing the face is better than hearing the name;
Hearing the name is better than seeing the face.
Even though he saved his nose,
Alas, he lost his eyes!

CASE 29: Not the Wind, Not the Flag

Case:

The wind was flapping a temple flag, and two monks were having an argument about it. One said, “The flag is moving.” The other said, “The wind is moving.” They argued back and forth but could not reach the truth. The Sixth Ancestor¹¹¹ said, “It is not the wind that moves. It is not the flag that moves. It is your mind that moves.” The two monks were struck with awe.

Mumon's Commentary:

It is not the wind that moves; it is not the flag that moves; it is not the mind that moves. Where do you see the essence of the Ancestor? If you have a close grasp of the matter, you will see how the two monks, intending to buy iron, got gold, and that the Ancestor impatiently said a failure on the spot.

Verse:

The wind moves, the flag moves, the mind moves;
All have missed it.
One only knows how to open one's mouth,
And does not know that one's words have failed.

CASE 30: Mind Itself, Buddha Itself

Case:

Daibai¹¹² asked Baso¹¹³, “What is Buddha?” Baso answered, “Mind itself, Buddha itself.”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ One *ri* was about 405m in ancient China.

¹¹¹ Daikan Enô (638-713), the Sixth Ancestor. Cf. Case 23.

¹¹² Daibai Hôjô (752-839) < Baso Dôitsu.

¹¹³ Baso Dôitsu (709-788) < Nangaku Ejô.

¹¹⁴ *Sokushin-sokubutsu*. The character *soku* means immediate equivalent or identity. The repetition of *soku* can be taken for emphasis.

Mumon's Commentary:

If you grasp it on the spot, you wear Buddha's clothes, eat Buddha's food, speak Buddha's words, do Buddha's deeds; you are Buddha himself. Though this may be so, Daibai has, alas, misled not a few people into mistaking the mark on the balance for the weight itself. How can he realize that even the mere mention of the word "Buddha" should make a man rinse his mouth for three days? If one is such a man, when he hears someone say, "Mind itself, Buddha itself," he will cover his ears and run away.

Verse:

The blue sky, the broad daylight – .
It is most detestable to hunt around;
If, furthermore, you ask, "What is Buddha?"
It is like shouting your innocence while holding the loot.

CASE 31: Jōshū Sees Through an Old Woman ¹¹⁵

Case:

A monk once asked an old woman, "What is the way to Mount Godai¹¹⁶?" The old woman said, "Go straight on." After the monk had gone a few steps, she said, "This good, respectful monk goes off that way, too."

Later a monk told Jōshū¹¹⁷ about this. Jōshū said, "Wait a bit. I will go and see through the old woman for you." The next day he went and asked the same question, and the old woman also made the same reply.

On returning, Jōshū said to his disciples, "I have seen through the old woman of Mt. Godai for you."

Mumon's Commentary:

The old woman just sits in her tent and knows how to plan the strategy, but she still doesn't know how to capture the bandit. Old Jōshū was clever enough to steal into the camp and menace the fortress, but he hasn't the air of a magnanimous man. Pondering the matter, we must say they both had their faults. Tell me now, what insight did Jōshū get into the old woman?

Verse:

The question is the same,
The answer is the same, too.
Sand in the rice,
Thorns in the mud.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Case 10 of the *Shoyoroku*.

¹¹⁶ Sometimes called *Seiryōzan*, it is a mountain in northern China (about 270km south-west of Beijing, or about 170km north-north-west of the place where Jōshū resided) with five peaks (3058m). As the sacred dwelling place of Bodhisattva Manjusri (symbol of the wisdom of enlightenment), it has been an especially holy mountain from the time of the Six Dynasties. Zen practitioners used to make pilgrimages to this special mountain.

¹¹⁷ Jōshū Jūshin (778-897) < Nansen Fugan < Baso Dōitsu < Nangaku Ejō.

CASE 32: A Non-Buddhist Questions Buddha ¹¹⁸

Case:

A non-Buddhist asked the World-Honored One, “I ask neither for words about Being nor for words about Non-Being.” The World-Honored One sat still. The non-Buddhist praised him, saying, “The world-Honored One in his benevolence and great mercy has opened the clouds of my delusion and enabled me to enter the Way.” Then, bowing, he took his leave. Ananda asked Buddha, “What did the non-Buddhist realize that made him praise you so much?” The World-Honored One replied, “He is just like a fine horse that runs even at the shadow of a whip.”

Mumon's Commentary:

Ananda is Buddha's disciple, but his realization is less than the non-Buddhist's. Now tell me, how far is the distance between the non-Buddhist and Buddha's disciple?

Verse:

Walking on the edge of a sword,
Running over a ridge of jagged ice;
Not using steps or ladders,
Jumping from the cliff with hands free.

CASE 33: Not-Mind, Not-Buddha

Case:

A monk asked Baso¹¹⁹, “What is Buddha?” Baso replied, “Not-mind, Not-Buddha.”¹²⁰

Mumon's Commentary:

If you can see and grasp what was said here, your Zen study is finished.

Verse:

If you meet a swordsman, you may present a sword;
You should not offer a poem unless you meet a poet.
When you speak to others, say only three-quarters of it;
You should never give the remaining part.

CASE 34: Knowing Is Not the Way

¹¹⁸ Cf. Case 65 of the *Hekiganroku*.

¹¹⁹ Baso Dōitsu (709-788) < Nangaku Ejō.

¹²⁰ *Hishin-hibutsu*. The character for *hi* stands for overall negation.

Case:

Nansen¹²¹ said, “Mind is not Buddha¹²²; knowing¹²³ is not the Way¹²⁴.”

Mumon's Commentary:

It should be said of Nansen that he has grown old and knows no shame. Just opening his stinking mouth he exposed the disgrace of his own household. There are very few, however, who are grateful for his kindness.

Verse:

When the sky clears, the sun appears;

When the rain falls, the earth is wet.

Everything has been preached with all the heart.

The fear is, however, that nobody can believe it.

CASE 35: Seijo's Soul Is Separated

Case:

Goso¹²⁵ asked a monk, “Seijo’s¹²⁶ soul is separated; which one is the true Seijo?”

Mumon's Commentary:

If you realize the true one in this, you will understand that getting out of one shell and entering another is just like a traveler staying at an inn; if you have not realized it, don't rush about wildly. When earth, water, fire, and wind are suddenly about to decompose, you will be like

¹²¹ Nansen Fugan (748-835) < Baso Dôitsu < Nangaku Ejô.

¹²² Cf. Baso's saying “Mind itself, Buddha itself” in Case 30.

¹²³ Or “wisdom.”

¹²⁴ Cf. Case 19.

¹²⁵ Goso Hôen (1024? -1104) < Haku'un Shutân < Yôgi Hôe (Rinzai Line).

¹²⁶ *Seijo* literally means “the girl Sei”. The story of Sei comes from an old Chinese legend of the T'ang period: Once upon a time in the province of Kô there lived an old man named Chôkan. Chôkan loved his beautiful daughter Sei very much. Chôkan used to tease her when she was still a child, saying that her beauty matched that of her cousin, the handsome Ôchû. Just about the time that the two cousins realized they were in love, Chôkan announced his choice of another man as husband for Sei. The young lovers were heartbroken. Ôchû left the town, setting off in a small boat. He had rowed a distance when he noticed someone running along the bank, waving to him. To his great joy he found that it was Sei who had followed him. They decided to travel to a far-off land and make a life together. A few years later, when Sei had become the mother of two children, she realized for the first time how deep the parent's love is. Her conscience began to bother her about the way she had treated her beloved father. Her husband Ôchû, who also regretted what they had done to Chôkan, suggested that they return to their homeland to ask for his forgiveness. When they arrived in the province Kô, Sei remained in the boat while Ôchû went to apologize to Chôkan and tell him what had happened. The old man listened incredulously. Finally he asked Ôchû when he was talking about. The young husband replied, “Your daughter Sei.” “But Sei never left home!” the old man exclaimed. “Shortly after you went away she became ill and is still confined to bed. She hasn't uttered a word since you left.” “You must be mistaken,” Ôchû replied. “Sei followed me, and we went together to a far-off country. We're married and have two children. She is in excellent health and wants to see you again and ask your forgiveness for running away and marrying without your permission. If you don't believe me, come down to the boat and see for yourself.” The old man was reluctant, so Ôchû went alone to bring Sei back to her father's house. In the meantime, Chôkan went into the bedroom to tell the sick Sei what had happened. Without a word, the invalid rose from her bed and rushed out to meet the approaching Sei, and the two became one. Chôkan said to his daughter, “Ever since Ôchû left, you have been dumb and lifeless, as though your soul had fled.” Sei told him, “I didn't know I was home sick in bed. When I heard that Ôchû had left, I followed his boat as if in a dream.”

a crab which has fallen into boiling water and its seven arms and eight legs. At that time, don't say I didn't warn you.

Verse:

The clouds and the moon are the same;
Valleys and mountains are different from each other.
All are happy, ten thousand times happy!
Is this one? Is this two?¹²⁷

CASE 36: Meeting a Man Who Has Accomplished the Way

Case:

Goso¹²⁸ said, “If you meet a person on the path who has accomplished the Way, do not greet the person with words or silence.”¹²⁹ Tell me, how will you greet that person?”

Mumon's Commentary:

If you can answer this question fittingly, you are certainly to be congratulated. But if you cannot, you should look for it attentively, wherever you are.

Verse:

Meeting on the path a person who has accomplished the Way,
Do not greet the person with words or silence:
I will punch you in the face:
If you realize, realize on the spot.

CASE 37: The Oak Tree in the Garden ¹³⁰

Case:

A monk asked Jôshû¹³¹, “What is the meaning of the Dharma Ancestor's coming from the West?”¹³² Jôshû said, “The oak tree in the garden.”

Mumon's Commentary:

If you see through Jôshû's response clearly, there is no Shakyamuni in the past, no Maitreya in the future.

Verse:

¹²⁷ It is also possible to translate: “This is one, this is two.”

¹²⁸ Goso Hôen (1024? -1104) < Haku'un Shutan < Yôgi Hôe (Rinzai Line).

¹²⁹ Master Goso quotes a saying by Kyôgen Chikan Zenji (? -898). Cf. also the verse of Hekiganroku 82.

¹³⁰ Cf. Case 47 of the *Shoyoroku*.

¹³¹ Jôshû Jûshin (778-897) < Nansen Fugan < Baso Dôitsu < Nangaku Ejô.

¹³² A common question asking about the real meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from India, that is, about the real significance of Zen or about our true Self.

Words do not express the fact,
Speech does not match the student;
Attached to words, one loses the reality,
Stagnating in phrases, one is deluded.

CASE 38: A Cow Passes through a Latticed Window

Case:

Goso¹³³ said, “For example, it's just like a great cow passing through a latticed window. Her head, horns, and four legs have passed through. Why is it that her tail can't pass through?”

Mumon's Commentary:

If in regard to this you are able to turn yourself upside down, attain one single eye, and utter a turning word, you will be able to repay the four obligations above and help the living beings of the three realms below. If you are still unable to do this, reflect again on the tail; then you will be able to grasp it for the first time.

Verse:

If it passes through, it will fall into a ditch;
If it turns back, it will be destroyed.
This tiny little tail –
What a strange and marvelous thing it is!

CASE 39: Ummon and a Mistake in Speech

Case:

A monk asked Ummon¹³⁴, “The radiance serenely illuminates the whole vast universe...” Before he could finish the first line, Ummon suddenly interrupted, “Aren't those the words of Chôsetsu Shûsai¹³⁵?” The monk replied, “Yes, they are.” Ummon said, “You have slipped up into the words.”

Afterwards, Zen Master Shishin brought the matter up and said, “Tell me, at what point did he slip?”

Mumon's Commentary:

If, as regards this case, you have grasped Ummon's lofty and unapproachable activity and how the monk slipped up in his words, you are worthy to become a teacher of men and heavenly beings. If you are not yet clear about it, you have not even saved yourself.

¹³³ Goso Hôen (1024? -1104) < Haku'un Shutan < Yôgi Hôe (Rinzai Line).

¹³⁴ Ummon Bun'en (864-949) < Seppô Gison < Tokusan Senkan < ... < Seigen Gyôshi. The founder of the Ummon School.

¹³⁵ He practiced Zen as a lay person under Sekisô Keisho (807-888; < Dôgo Enchi < Yakusan Igen) and became a Dharma-heir of Sekisô.

Verse:

Angling in a swift stream
He catches those who are greedy for bait.
If you open your mouth even a bit,
Your life will be lost.

CASE 40: Kicking Over the Water Jug

Case:

When Master Isan¹³⁶ was under Hyakujô¹³⁷, he had the position of tenzo. Hyakujô wanted to choose a master for Mt. Dai'i¹³⁸. He called the head monk and the rest of his disciples together to have them present their views and said that the outstanding person should be sent. Then he took a water jug, put it on the floor, and said, "You may not call this a water jug. What will you call it?" The head monk said, "It cannot be called a wooden sandal." Hyakujô then asked Isan. Isan immediately kicked over the water jug and left. Hyakujô laughed and said, "First monk, you have been defeated by Isan." So he ordered Isan to found the new monastery.

Mumon's Commentary:

Isan summoned up all his valor, but, alas, he could not jump out of Hyakujô's trap. Upon examination, he favors the heavy and not the light. But why? Look! Though he removed his headband, he put on an iron yoke.

Verse:

Tossing away the bamboo buckets and ladles,
He makes a vigorous thrust and cuts off hindrances;
Hyakujô's heavy barrier cannot interrupt his rush,
Countless Buddhas come forth from his toes.

CASE 41: Bodhidharma Puts the Mind to Rest

Case:

Bodhidharma¹³⁹ sat facing the wall. The Second Ancestor¹⁴⁰, standing in the snow, cut off his arm and said, "Your disciple's mind is not yet at peace. I beg you, Master, put it to rest." Bodhidharma said, "Bring your mind to me and I will give it rest." The Ancestor said, "I have searched for the mind but have never been able to find it." Bodhidharma said, "I have finished putting it to rest for you."

¹³⁶ Isan Reiyû (771-853) < Hyakujô Ekai (749-814) < Baso Dôitsu < Nangaku Ejô. Later, Isan became the co-founder of the Igyô School.

¹³⁷ Cf. note above.

¹³⁸ A mountain the Province of Konan. It is called *Dai'isan* or *Isan* [*Dai* means "great," *san* means "mountain"].

¹³⁹ He is supposed to have come from India to China about 520 CE.

¹⁴⁰ The Second Ancestor in China, Jinkô Eka (487-593).

Mumon's Commentary:

The broken-toothed old barbarian came thousands of miles across the sea with an active spirit. It can rightly be said that he raised waves where there was no wind. In later life he obtained one disciple, but even he was crippled in his six senses. Ha! The fools do not even know four characters.

Verse:

Coming from the West and pointing directly to it –
All the trouble comes from the transmission;
The one who disturbs the monasteries
Is originally you.

CASE 42: A Woman Comes Out of Samadhi

Case:

Once in the ancient days of the World-Honored One, Manjusri¹⁴¹ went to the place where Buddhas were assembled and found that all the Buddhas were departing for their original dwelling places. Only a young woman remained, sitting in samadhi close to Shakyamuni Buddha's throne. Manjusri asked the Buddha, "Why can that woman be near the Buddha's throne while I cannot?" The Buddha said, "Just awaken her and raise her up out of samadhi and ask her yourself." Manjusri walked around the woman three times, snapped his fingers once, took her up to the Brahman heaven, and exerted all his supernatural powers, but he could not bring her out of samadhi. The World-Honored One said, "Even a hundred or a thousand Manjusris would not be able to bring her out of samadhi. Down below, past twelve hundred million lands as innumerable as the sand of the Ganges, is the Bodhisattva Momyô. He will be able to arouse her from her samadhi." Instantly the Bodhisattva Momyô emerged out of the earth and made a bow to the World-Honored One, who then gave his command. The Bodhisattva went before the woman and snapped his fingers once. At this, the woman came out of samadhi.

Mumon's Commentary:

Old Shakyamuni plays a country drama on stage, but people of shallow realization cannot appreciate it. Just tell me: Manjusri is the teacher of the Seven Buddhas; why can't he bring the woman out of her samadhi while Momyô, who is a bodhisattva in the beginning stage, can? If you can grasp this completely, you will realize that surging delusive consciousness is nothing other than greatest samadhi.

Verse:

One can awaken her, the other cannot;
Both have their own freedom.
A god-mask here and a devil-mask there;
Even in failure, an elegant performance.

¹⁴¹ Cf. the note to Case 31.

CASE 43: Shuzan's Shippei

Case:

Master Shuzan¹⁴² held up a *shippei*¹⁴³ before his disciples and said, “You monks, if you call this a *shippei*, you ruin¹⁴⁴ (the matter). If you do not call this a *shippei*, you oppose (the matter). Tell me, you monks, what will you call it?”

Mumon's Commentary:

“If you call this a *shippei*, you ruin (the matter). If you do not call this a *shippei*, you oppose (the matter)”. You should not use words. You should not use no-words. Speak at once! Speak at once!

Verse:

Holding up a *shippei*,
He issues the order to kill and to give life;
When “ruining” and “opposing” interweavingly attack,
Even the Buddhas and Ancestors beg for their lives.

CASE 44: Bashô's Shujô

Case:

Master Bashô¹⁴⁵ said to the assembly, “There is a *shujô*¹⁴⁶ with you; then I will give you a *shujô*. There is no *shujô* with you; then I will take the *shujô* from you.”

Mumon's Commentary:

Supporting us, it wades¹⁴⁷ across a river that has no bridge. Accompanying us, it returns¹⁴⁸ to the village on a moonless night. But if you call it a *shujô*, you will go to hell as swiftly as an arrow.

Verse:

The depths and shallows everywhere
Are within the grip;
It supports the heavens and sustains the earth,

¹⁴² Shuzan Shônen (92-993) < Fuketsu Enshô (Rinzai Line).

¹⁴³ A *shippei* is a staff made of bamboo about half a meter in length and shaped like a small bow. A Zen master keeps it at his or her side in the zendo when guiding the disciples. It symbolically represents Buddha's arm.

¹⁴⁴ *Fureru/shoku* (触) generally means “to touch, feel,” but here it stand for “to hurt, break, destroy, ruin, mar etc.”

¹⁴⁵ Bashô Esei (?-?; from Korea) < Nantô Kôyû (850-938) < Kyôzan Ejaku.

¹⁴⁶ A *shujô* is a kind of staff, somewhat longer than a *shippei* and used when instructing students, punishing a monk who violated some laws, or walking out-of-doors. Besides serving as a kind of cane, it was useful to gauge the depth of rivers which had to be crossed, and it scattered insects which otherwise would have been stepped on and killed. It symbolically represents Buddha's leg.

¹⁴⁷ Another translation can be: “Having it support us, we wade”

¹⁴⁸ Another possible translation is: “Having it accompany us, we return”

Everywhere it enhances the spirit of our sect.

CASE 45: Who Is That One?

Case:

Master and Ancestor En¹⁴⁹ of Tôzan¹⁵⁰ said, “Even Shakyamuni and Maitreya are servants of *that* one. Just tell me, who is *that* one?”

Mumon's Commentary:

If you clearly recognize *that* one, it will be just like meeting your own father at the crossroads. It is not necessary to ask others whether it is he or not.

Verse:

Don't draw another's bow;
Don't ride another's horse;
Don't speak of another's faults;
Don't inquire into another's affairs.

CASE 46: Stepping Forward on Top of a Pole ¹⁵¹

Case:

Master Sekiso¹⁵² said, “How should you take a step forward on top¹⁵³ of a hundred-foot pole?” Also, an eminent master of old¹⁵⁴ said, “Even though one who is sitting on top of a hundred-foot pole has entered realization, it is not yet real. One must step forward on top of the hundred-foot pole and manifest the whole body throughout the world of ten directions¹⁵⁵.”

Mumon's Commentary:

If you can step forward and turn your body around, there will be no place where you are not called honorable. Even so, just tell me, how do you step forward on top¹⁵⁶ of the hundred-foot pole? Ahem!¹⁵⁷

Verse:

¹⁴⁹ Goso Hôen (1024? -1104) < Haku'un Shutân < Yôgi Hôe (Rinzai Line).

¹⁵⁰ “Tôzan” means „East Mountain,” the original name of the mountain „Goso-zan” (Mount Goso), where Hôen lived.

¹⁵¹ Cf. also *Shoyoroku* 79.

¹⁵² Probably Sekisô Soen Zenji (987-1040; < Bun'yô Zenshō < ... < Rinzai Gigen), and *not* Sekisô Keisho (807-868; < Dôgo Enchi < ... < Seigen Gyôshi).

¹⁵³ Another translation: “from the top”.

¹⁵⁴ This is Chôsa Keijin Zenji (? -868; < Nansen Fugan (748-835) < Baso Dôitsu < Nangaku Ejô). Cf. *Shoyoroku* Case 79.

¹⁵⁵ Another translation: “One must step forward on top¹⁵⁵ of the hundred-foot pole. The world of ten directions *manifests* your whole body.” Cf. *Shoyoroku* 79, in which Chôsa's statement reads, “One must step forward on top of the hundred-foot pole. The world of ten directions *is* your whole body.”

¹⁵⁶ Cf. the note above.

¹⁵⁷ “Sa!” The sound of a hoarse voice. It means, “I have talked myself hoarse! (= I talked too much)”

Making the eye on the forehead blind,
One clings to the mark on the scale;
Throwing away body and life,
One blind person leads many blind people.

CASE 47: Tosotsu's Three Barriers ¹⁵⁸

Case:

Master Tosotsu Etsu¹⁵⁹ set up three barriers and asked his students:

[1] “The purpose of making one's way through grasses and asking a master about the subtle truth is only to realize one's self-nature. Now, you venerable monks, where is your self-nature at this very moment?

[2] “When you have attained your self-nature, you can free yourself from life-and-death. How will you free yourself from life-and-death when the light of your eyes is falling to the ground ¹⁶⁰?

[3] “When you have freed yourself from life-and-death, you know where to go. After your four elements have decomposed¹⁶¹, where will you go?”

Mumon's Commentary:

If you can say three turning words about these barriers, you will be the master wherever you may be, in close contact with the real essence in all situations. If you have not yet reached this stage, gulping down your food will fill you up quickly, while chewing well will make it more difficult to become hungry again.

Verse:

In one consciousness, we see the whole of eternity;
Eternity is nothing other than right now.
If you see through this one consciousness at this moment,
You see through the one who is seeing right now.

CASE 48: Kempô's One Way ¹⁶²

Case:

A monk asked Master Kempô¹⁶³, “[In a sutra¹⁶⁴ it says,] 'The Bhagavat¹⁶⁵ in ten directions; the one way to the gate of nirvana.' I wonder where the way is.” Kempô held up his staff, drew a line and said, “Here it is.”

¹⁵⁸ Cf. *Miscellaneous Koans* 17.

¹⁵⁹ Tosotsu Jûetsu (1044-1091) < ... < Ôryû Enan (Rinzai Line).

¹⁶⁰ When you are about to die.

¹⁶¹ after you have died.

¹⁶² Cf. Case 61 of the *Shoyoroku*.

¹⁶³ Esshû Kempô (?-?) < Tôzan Ryôkai (807-869).

¹⁶⁴ The *Surangama-samadhi-sutra*.

¹⁶⁵ It means something similar as “god” in Sanskrit. Here it stands for Buddha.

Later a monk asked Ummon¹⁶⁶ to give instruction about this. Ummon held up his fan and said, “This fan jumps up to the heaven of the thirty-three devas and adheres to the nose of the Deva Taishaku¹⁶⁷. When a carp in the eastern sea is struck with a stick, it rains torrents as though a tray of water is overturned.”

Mumon's Commentary:

One goes to the bottom of the deepest sea, heaving sand and raising dust. The other stands on the top of the highest mountain, causing white waves to billow up to the sky. Gripping it tightly or letting it loose, each of them extends a single hand and together they support the essential principle of the School. It is just like two camels violently smashing against each other. In this world there will be no one who can justly interfere in this collision. Examining with the true eye, you will find that neither of the old masters knows where the Way is.

Verse:

Before a step is taken, the goal is reached;
Before the tongue is moved, the speech is finished.
Though you may take the initiative, point by point,
You must know there is still the all-surpassing hole¹⁶⁸.

Amban's Forty ninth CASE:

Old Zen Master Mumon composed the forty-eight cases and judged the koans of venerable masters of ancient times. He is just like a friend bean-cake vendor who makes his buyers open their mouths and eat his cakes until they are unable either to swallow them down or vomit them up. Even so, Amban¹⁶⁹ wants to bake yet another piece of cake in his red-hot oven to present to Mumon. I don't know where the old master will dig his teeth into it. If he can eat it in one bite, he will emit light and shake the earth. If not, it and the other forty-eight cases will emit all turn into hot sand. Speak at once! Speak at once!

A sutra says: “Stop it! Stop it! It should not be expounded. My Dharma is subtle and difficult to speculate on.”

Amban says, “Where does the Dharma come from? On what basis does its subtlety lie? What is it when it is expounded? Why call only Bukan a chatterbox¹⁷⁰? Shakyamuni himself was wordy. The old man raised phantoms and so entangled the descendants of hundreds and thousands of generations in creepers and vines that they are unable to stick their heads out. Such amazing talks as these cases cannot be spooned, though we try to pick them up, or cooked enough, though

¹⁶⁶ Ummon Bun'en (864-949) < Seppō Gison < Tokusan Senkan < ... < Seigen Gyōshi. The founder of the Ummon School.

¹⁶⁷ *Sakra-devanam-Indra*, a main deity protecting the Buddha Dharma on top of Mt. Sumeru. Around this deity there are eight Devas in each of the four directions, so altogether there are thirty-three Devas.

¹⁶⁸ Another possible interpretation: “all-surpassing breakthrough (=all-surpassing dimension)”.

¹⁶⁹ His real name was Tei Seishi (1176-1251), Amban being his Zen (or literary) name. He was noted figure in politics as well as in the field of literature.

¹⁷⁰ When Master Bukan was abbot at Kokuseiji Temple in Mt. Tendai, Kanzan and Jittoku (two legendary Zen persons, who always appear as a pair) visited him in the kitchen. He greeted the two, saying “Here come Bodhisattvas Manjusri and Samantabhadra!” Upon this the two named him “Bukan, the chatterbox.”

we steam them in a boiling pot. There was an onlooker who asked in some confusion, After all, how will you decide?" Amban placed his ten fingernails together in supplication and said, "Stop! Stop! It is not to be expounded. My Dharma is subtle and difficult to speculate about." Then he suddenly drew a small circle over the two characters for "difficult" and "speculate" and showed it to the people. The five thousand scrolls of the entire Buddhist writings as well as Vimalakirti's¹⁷¹ "Dharma- gate of Not-Two"¹⁷² are all in it.

Verse:

If one says fire is light,
Do not respond, shake your head.
Only a thief recognizes a thief,
At one question he immediately nods.

Early summer of the sixth year of Shun'yû (1246)
Written by Amban at a fishing villa by West Lake.

¹⁷¹ Vimalakirti was a famous lay student of Shakyamuni Buddha.

¹⁷² Cf. Hekigaroku 84 as well as Shoyoroku 48.