

CASE 62

Unmon's Single Treasure



By Yamada Kôun

Instruction:

Using the wisdom of no teacher, he reveals the wondrous activity of non-doing. Using the compassion of no relationships, he becomes the outstanding friend who does not need to be asked. In one word there is killing, there is giving life. In the midst of a single activity there is letting go and holding fast. Just tell me. Who formerly came in this way? To test, I cite this case. Look!

Case:

Unmon spoke to the assembly saying, "Between heaven and earth and within the universe there is a single jewel. It secretly dwells within the mountain of form. It picks up a lantern, goes to the Buddha hall, takes the main gate and places it on the lantern."

Verse:

Look, look! Who is holding a fishing pole on the ancient banks?
The clouds roll on.
The waters stretch out endlessly.
In the bright moon the white reed-flowers. Look for yourself.

On the instruction:

There are now approximately one-and-a-half days remaining in the sesshin and all of you are doing your very best. Yet it remains difficult for many to "kill" themselves in the sense of killing their ego-consciousness with the sword of Mu. I speak often about the sword that kills and the sword that gives life. To "kill" yourself means to cut off the delusive consciousness of an individual self. This involves becoming one with something to the point where you merge with it. In Zen, it is becoming one with Mu or the sitting itself until it is no longer "I am sitting" but rather just sitting with no additional "I" outside of this. When you truly realize, new life suddenly dances forth. You die the great death and gain the great life. This is kensho. Here is my reason for asking all of you to "kill" yourselves in the sense of killing that ego-consciousness. You have a golden opportunity to do this right here. When it seems you have done all you can and you still have not reached the goal it is important to pray. The text which we have just recited, the *Hotsuganmon* of Dôgen Zenji, is nothing less than Dôgen Zenji's fervent prayer: "Oh Buddhas and Patriarch," he says, "please remove my

karma and allow me to attain enlightenment.” Christians should pray in the way they are accustomed to while Buddhists offer their prayers to the Buddha, Monjusri, Fugen Bosatsu and Bodhidharma. But if you are still caught up in your ego-consciousness you cannot pray with true fervor. To pray with any effect you must empty yourself. And you can be sure that if you pray with true fervor your prayers will be answered.

When a baby is first born into the world she doesn't know anything, but people are already there waiting to pick her up and take care of her. It's similar with prayer. In a world unseen we are being watched over by those who wish only to help us and save us. In the field of spiritualism one would speak in terms of guardian spirits. In the Buddhist tradition, the Buddhas and Patriarchs from the limitless past are filled with the desire to save us. They send out waves of compassion like emitting waves of light. If we, on our part, pray with true fervor there will definitely be a response. The sutras also stress this in no uncertain terms.

Using the wisdom of no teacher, he reveals the wondrous activity of non-doing. Using the compassion of no relationships, he becomes the outstanding friend who does not need to be asked. The first lines speak about the wisdom of our essential nature, the Tathagata wisdom and virtue. “The wisdom of no teacher” is intrinsically present in our essential nature. We don't know how this is possible, the Buddha himself does not know, but that wisdom is there just the same. “It is perfectly present within each person,” the sutras tell us. Recall the koan, “Ôbaku's Drinkers of Lees” where Ôbaku says, “I do not say that there is no Zen, only that there are no teachers.”

Only you can come to a realization of your essential nature; no-one can do it for you. Everything I say in the dokusan room is simply an attempt to bring people to realization. I can show you how to hold the chopsticks and bring the food to your mouth. But it's you who has to chew it and swallow it. A kindly grandmother of old may have chewed the food in her mouth before putting it in the baby's mouth. But the baby had to swallow it himself before it could give any nourishment. It's all a matter of “you yourself knowing heat and cold,” to use another Zen phrase. This is the wisdom of no teacher. No one can teach it to you.

In his *Bendôwa* [On the Endeavor of the Way], Dôgen Zenji says, “Although this inconceivable dharma is abundant in each person, it is not actualized without practice, and it is not experienced without realization.” This teisho, when we get down to it, is simply my attempt to convince you that this essential nature is right there within you, waiting to be discovered. It is my attempt to tell you that if you practice fervently you will find it without fail. And once you have found it you can use it with perfect freedom. But, once again, it is only you who can discover this. Dôgen Zenji was addressing his remarks to everyone, and not just to those in the Soto Sect. When I practiced Zen under Asahina Sôgen Roshi at Engakuji Temple in Kamakura, he often quoted these words of Dôgen Zenji. This is a most basic truth. However, even within the Soto Sect of which Dôgen Zenji is the first patriarch here in Japan there are ideas like the following holding sway:

“Each one of us is perfectly endowed with the single jewel (Unmon's name for essential nature). It was Shakyamuni Buddha who first discovered this and the Zen patriarchs throughout history have also proved this in their own experiences. Thus, to wish now to discover this for oneself is to blaspheme the Buddha and the patriarchs. It is enough just to

believe.” So runs their argument.

I am left speechless before such distorted logic. This is an unpardonable error. And this type of thinking is being proposed by people in the upper echelons of the Soto Sect, including Kurebayashi Kôdô, a distinguished professor at Komazawa University, the official Soto institution.

In response to these ideas, Yasutani Haku'un Roshi minced no words in denouncing them outright. And he was quite right. After all, does not Dôgen Zenji say quite clearly, “it is not experienced without realization?” Just to hear second-hand from someone else that I am intrinsically endowed with Buddha-nature does not help me in the least. Unless I realize it myself it is not truly mine. Much less will I be able to use it with freedom. I don't know how matters have reached their present state in the Soto Sect, but this is certainly a deplorable situation. To bring forth the “wisdom of no teacher” you must practice, otherwise it will never reveal itself. And having realized it, you must continue practice to further polish that initial understanding.

“He reveals the wondrous activity of non-doing.” That means there is no trying or planning involved. It flows with perfect freedom like running water. We often come across this sort of thing in koans. To be able to act with perfect freedom without any thought as to how it should be done. (Needless to say, we also do things where good deliberation and planning are absolutely necessary). For example, when a baby is hungry she just cries without any thought as to whether she should or not. This is “the wondrous activity of no doing.” The baby didn't learn to do this. She just knows it. When we are itchy we scratch. When we hurt ourselves, the hand goes involuntarily to the sore spot. This is the most wondrous activity of no doing. Where does this activity come from? Even Shakyamuni Buddha would be stumped for an answer. This wisdom is usually referred to as an instinct. But instinct implies no knowledge of the essential world that underlies it. This is truly the wondrous activity of no doing.

Using the compassion of no relationships, he becomes the outstanding friend who does not need to be asked. In relationships such as those between parent and child or between siblings it is only natural to act with kindness and consideration. But to act with kindness and a compassionate heart toward total strangers...just what does that involve? Not long ago I read about a mother who no longer had enough nourishment herself to nurse her child. She ended up killing the child and herself. This was after having tried for a week to keep the child alive with sugar water. “What a tragic event. Couldn't someone have helped in such a circumstance?” you can't help asking yourself.

When we read about this in the newspaper and feel pity, this is the “compassion of no relationships.” It issues from the intrinsic unity of all things. If we were truly separate and distinct from each other there would be no such things as true compassion. It is precisely because we are one that these feelings arise. There are people who are more kind than others, but if you truly awaken to your essential nature this feeling of compassion toward others will grow even stronger. You will find yourself unable to act without kindness. The same could be said for the compassion of the Buddha or the love of God. Seen from the surface, Christ may not seem to have any relationship with each one of us. But it was out of his compassion for the

rest of humanity that he offered himself up in sacrifice on the Cross to save others. This, too, is the compassion of no relationships.

Buddhist followers are known as “outstanding friends” [shōyū]. Needless to say, there can be outstanding friends without their being Buddhists. But since Zen practitioners practice the same spiritual path and have the same realization experience as their goal, urging each other on in that practice, they can truly be called outstanding friends. This type of relationship often develops among people who are faced together with a life-and-death situation, all matters of satori aside. During my school days we used to sing a song which ran: “I cry when my friend is sad, and when I’m happy my friend dances.” Here is a fine example of an outstanding friend. Unfortunately, all too often these pure-hearted emotions give way later to feelings of *I vs. You or We vs. Them*. The instruction is of course talking about the compassion of the Buddha but also of the Zen master, in particular, Unmon.

In one word there is killing, there is giving life. In the midst of a single activity there is letting go and holding fast. Just tell me. Who formerly came in this way? To test, I cite this case. Look! One word has the power and ability to cut off all our delusions and at the same time bring us to the true life of realization. “Activity” here means the minutely subtle actions (raising a finger, twirling a flower, etc.). Any one of these can cause to “let go” (i.e., give life) or “hold fast” (kill). Each activity contains these two functions of killing and giving life in the sense of depriving the Zen practitioner of his or her delusions and bringing him or her to a realization of the truth. This is only possible for a true Zen master.

Unmon was a master of the appropriate word or phrase. In most cases he needed no more than a single word to perfectly express the fact. A good example is “Kan” (literally, “barrier”). The story of how he attained enlightenment under Bokushū is very famous. Every time that Unmon entered Bokushū’s room for dokusan, Bokushū would grab him by the lapels of his robe and say, “Say it! Say it!” Unmon was unable to say anything and Bokushū would then throw him outside again saying, “You worthless fellow!” This happened time after time until one day Unmon rapped on Bokushū’s door again for dokusan. Bokushū said, “Who’s there?” “Bun’en” [Unmon’s name] was the reply. Bokushū opened up the door a little and Unmon rushed in. As usual, Bokushū cried out, “Say it! Say it!” Once again, Unmon could not answer and Bokushū threw him outside. But this time, Unmon still had one leg inside the door as Bokushū slammed it shut. The force of the door closing on his leg broke it and Unmon screamed out in pain. At that instant he attained great enlightenment. All concepts and ideas were gone in that instant. There was just “Ouch, ouch, ouch!” We can see that Unmon came in this way to a very clear realization experience.

The Instruction now asks us if there is anyone who has reached the state of understanding outlined so far. Such a person would have to be a great Zen master, but has there ever been such a person? An example of such a person will be given now and we are advised to look carefully.

On the Case:

Unmon spoke to the assembly saying, “Between heaven and earth and within the universe there is a single jewel. It secretly dwells within the

mountain of form. It picks up a lantern, goes to the Buddha Hall, takes the main gate and places it on the lantern." The mountain of form is our body. This jewel dwells within the mountain of form which is your own body. Truly wonderful words for expressing this essential truth. I would ask you to decide for yourselves upon having truly grasped this single jewel whether or not this is the same as life itself. "There is a single jewel. It secretly dwells within the mountain of form." When we reach this point the distinction between Zen and Christianity has disappeared. It was Christ who said, "The Kingdom of God is within you." Would it be all right, perhaps, to say that the Kingdom of God is the single jewel spoken about in today's koan? I would ask the Christians here to sit with all earnestness and discover the Kingdom of God for themselves.

"It picks up a lantern, goes to the Buddha Hall." The lantern doesn't necessarily have to be one of those stone lanterns that you see in Japanese gardens. In ancient times people used to make use of paper lanterns which were something like present-day Buddhist altar lights. At any rate, you take this lantern and proceed in the middle of the night to the Buddha hall. It is the single jewel that is doing this. This is easy enough to understand. But what about putting the main gate on the lantern? Since this is the main gate of the temple it is a very large gate which consists of one large gate and two smaller gates on either side. And now we are taking these three gates and putting them on top of the lantern. This is a little more difficult. Since this is one of the checking points in the dokusan room I can't speak about it here. You must figure it out for yourself. But to give a little hint, if you truly grasp the world of Mu, you realize a world of total emptiness. That which is totally empty (which does not imply a vacuum) possesses infinite capabilities. That which is totally empty sees and hears and speaks. One of my students used to tell me in the dokusan room, "Mr. Emptiness is crying and laughing," although when you say "Mr. Emptiness" there's still a feeling that someone is there. But "Mr. Emptiness" has neither form nor shape, and yet he sleeps and gets up, etc. If you think in terms of some form you are already wide off the mark. Thus, there is no big and small, long or short in the world of emptiness. There is no form nor color. It is in terms of this world that we must understand this koan.

As I often tell you, all koans must be viewed from the standpoint of the essential if they are to be understood. It might seem like total nonsense to the uninitiated but once you have experienced that world for yourself they speak about the most natural things in the world. Do you understand? "It takes the main gate and places it on the lantern." These are wonderful words.

On the Verse:

Look, look! Who is holding a fishing pole on the ancient banks? Oh, look! Someone is fishing on the ancient banks of the river. What is this ancient bank? It is the river bank without beginning or end. Now some strange person whom I have never seen before is fishing on the bank. If I look a little closer, it seems to be Unmon. In the Verse at this point, Engo adds a comment saying, "If you see someone's jowls even looking from the back, don't have anything to do with him." A jowly person is one who is evil-tempered so we should

avoid such a person. Who is that person? This is perhaps Setchô's way of describing Unmon. "Seeking to catch a great fish I really caught a strange one. Look carefully."

The clouds roll on. The waters stretch out endlessly. The next two lines about clouds and water are producing the single jewel for us to see. "The clouds roll on. The waters stretch out endlessly. In the bright moon the white reed flowers....look for yourself." What is that? That is the single jewel itself.

Iida Tôin Roshi, an outstanding Zen master in the early 20th century, quoted Bashô's famous haiku as a sort of capping verse for this koan.

On a withered branch

A crow is perched:

An autumn evening. (Aitken)

In the spirit of rhyming along with Tôin Roshi, I would like to add this verse:

When just look,

Shepherd's purse is blooming

Beneath the hedge.

In the bright moon the white reed-flowers. Look for yourself.