

CASE 68

**Kyôzan's
"What's Your Name?"**



By Yamada Kôun

Instruction:

In overturning the North Star, upsetting the axis of the earth, catching tigers and rhinos, or distinguishing between snakes and dragons, there must be an extremely sharp fellow for each phrase to match and each activity can correspond. But has there been anyone up to now who was truly like this? I ask to bring this up. Look!

Case:

Kyôzan asked Sanshō, "What is your name?" Sanshō said, "Ejaku." Kyôzan said, "Ejaku, that's me." Sanshō said, "My name is Enen." Kyôzan laughed loudly.

Verse:

Gathering in both and letting go of both...what is the basis?
Riding a tiger has always required supreme skill.
Having stopped laughing, I don't know where the laughter has gone to.
But it should stir the sad wind a thousand years old.

On the Instruction:

In overturning the North Star, upsetting the axis of the earth, catching tigers and rhinos, or distinguishing between snakes and dragons, there must be an extremely sharp fellow for each phrase to match and each activity can correspond. The North Star and the earth's axis are used as metaphors for the most important things in the universe. The North Star can also be taken as meaning the sky itself. The earth's axis can likewise be taken as meaning the bowels of the earth. This is a poetic way of describing the absolute freedom of activity which the true Zen person possesses. It is having heaven and earth in the palm of one's hand. For a person who has truly realized that heaven and earth are one, this is no difficult matter. So long as there is still a separation between you and heaven and earth, that won't be possible.

"Tigers and rhinos" can be taken as a reference to Sanshō who appears in the main case. It takes a person of great ability indeed to take hold of an outstanding Zen man like

Sanshō and bring him to the point where he cannot utter a sound. To be able to distinguish between dragons and snakes is the ability to discern on the spot whether a person has true Zen understanding. Is that person a real dragon or just an ordinary snake? Only a Zen person of outstanding ability will be able to decide. As the Instruction says, “It must be an extremely sharp fellow.” This includes, of course, a quick perceptive mind, but that is certainly not all. In addition, that person’s enlightened eye must be as sharp as can be.

The ability to respond instantly and appropriately to anything the student may present is certainly not the product of a quick intellect. One’s enlightened eye must be sparkling. Then “each phase can match and each activity can correspond.” In other words, that person will be able to respond immediately to any question put by the student. To be able to come back instantly when something is put forward, just like an echo. Here the focus is on Sanshō who comes as a guest.

But has there been anyone up to now who was truly like this? I ask to bring this up. Look! Our attention is drawn to the events in the main case and we are told to look carefully.

On the Case:

Kyōzan asked Sanshō, “What is your name?” Sanshō said, “Ejaku.” Kyōzan said, “Ejaku, that’s me.” Sanshō said, “My name is Enen.” Kyōzan laughed loudly. The case begins with Kyōzan asking Sanshō, so it might seem as if Kyōzan had paid a visit on Sanshō, but actually it was the other way around. Sanshō was Rinzai’s most outstanding student and a very great Zen man. When he went out on Zen pilgrimage and entered into exchanges with various Zen masters to sharpen his enlightened understanding, Kyōzan was one of the people he visited. At that time Kyōzan asked Sanshō his name. He undoubtedly knew his name already since Sanshō was well known by that time, having made quite a name for himself as he traveled from temple to temple. Since Sanshō was supposed to be quite a fellow, Kyōzan deliberately pretended that he didn’t know the name of his guest, because he wanted to check him by seeing how he responded.

Sanshō replied, “Ejaku.” Ejaku was actually the name of the person who asked the question, in other words, Kyōzan. A very interesting reply. Imagine if someone came to me and, upon my asking his name, he were to say, “Kyōzō Yamada.” Just what is going on here? We can understand this using the fraction I always cite as an example where the denominator is zero-and-infinite (satori is coming to a realization of this denominator) and the numerator (α) is anything at all. Let’s say the denominator in this case is the person called Kyōzan Ejaku. It is this Kyōzan who asks, “What is your name?” and Sanshō who answers, “Ejaku.” With this answer, Kyōzan disappears completely. The numerator which is Kyōzan Ejaku has completely disappeared, and all that remains is the empty and infinite denominator. This has been expressed in various ways in Zen literature. For example, to erase the numerator is known as *shū* or “gathering in” or *datsu* [“stealing”] or *setsu* [“killing”]. All that remains is the empty and infinite denominator.

In response to this, Kyōzan says, “Ejaku...that’s me.” With this, the numerator comes to life. This is *hō* [“letting go”] or *yo* [“giving”] or *katsu* [“giving life”]. When the phenomenal

world appears, this is known as giving life. For whatever you bring, this is the appearance of the denominator. This time Sanshō says, “My name is Enen,” thus saying his own name. Once again, with this reply, the world of the numerator comes to life.

Kyōzan laughed loudly. Ha, ha, ha! What kind of laughter is this? With this laughter, Kyōzan realizes that Sanshō’s ability is on a level with his own and is delighted. They are completely conversant with each other in the world of their Zen experience. Kyōzan certainly had reason to be happy. His laughter is one of endless brightness. Engo interjects a comment at this point, saying that Kyōzan’s laughter is different indeed from that of Gantō in Case 66. When Gantō laughs, there is poison in his laughter, as if to say, “I have no time to waste with this worthless monk.” But in Kyōzan’s laughter there is nothing but boundless and bright joy.

I address these next comments to those of you here who are working on koans. I just mentioned that when Sanshō answers “Ejaku” to the question “What is your name?” this is a case of *shū* or gathering in. But in other editions of the *Blue Cliff Record* this is seen as *hō* or letting go, which is the exact opposite of what I have been saying. I also went on to say that “Ejaku...that’s my name” is giving and that “My name is Enen” is letting go, since the phenomenal world comes to life with these answers.

In the standard editions of the *Blue Cliff Record* which are in used today in Japan, the interpretation of what is going on in the koan is the opposite of what I have just said. For example, the edition of the *Blue Cliff Record* in the *Iwanami Bunko* series with footnotes by Asahina Sōgen Roshi. However, there are actually two versions of the *Blue Cliff Record* in existence. The one most commonly used in Japan is the so-called *Chōhon* version which was produced by a certain *Chang Ming Yuan* about 1300 AD during the Yuan Dynasty and 172 years after the *Blue Cliff Record* first appeared. The other version is known either as the *Fukuhon* or *Shokuhon*, which was the version most used in China up until recent times. This must have also come to Japan at some point, but it does not appear in print very often. Asahina Roshi makes a painstaking comparison of the two editions in his footnotes to the *Blue Cliff Record*. But, as I mentioned, in this other, lesser known version, Sanshō’s first reply of “Ejaku” is taken as “stealing” and Kyōzan’s reply of “Ejaku...that’s me” is taken as “giving,” which is the same as my own interpretation. This is the opposite of what appears in the longer commentary on the verse for this koan as it appears in Asahina Roshi’s version. But there are also versions which agree with my explanation, and I can’t help feeling that this is the correct interpretation. In other words, in the world of the denominator (zero-and-infinite) there is nothing at all while at the same time containing infinite capabilities. But we are unable to catch this. When we speak of “killing,” this is the essential world where not a thing remains. Unless we think of the phenomenal world as “giving,” the meaning of the entire section remains unclear.

On the Verse:

Gathering in both and letting go of both...what is the basis? Riding a tiger has always required supreme skill. The first line is a reference to the exchange between Sanshō and Kyōzan, who alternately gather in and let go. The Verse praises the two

of them for their total freedom in gathering in and letting go, in killing and giving life. If we look at the Main Case, again, when Sanshō says, “Ejaku,” he has “stolen away” Kyōzan, ... this would be Sanshō’s stealing or gathering in. When Kyōzan says, “Ejaku..that’s my name,” this is Kyōzan letting go. In response to this, Sanshō says, “My name is Enen.” This is Sanshō letting go. And when Kyōzan laughs loudly, this is Kyōzan gathering in. That laugh is the total expression of the essential. The verse praises the two of them for their complete freedom in letting go and gathering in. What a marvelous exchange! The poet asks, “What is the basis of this wonderful freedom?”

As for the second line about riding a tiger, I feel that the tiger here is Sanshō. We can also say that Sanshō was riding Kyōzan, but since Kyōzan is the master and Sanshō the guest, so to speak, in this exchange, the verse is saying that Kyōzan was able to ride with complete freedom that wily tiger Sanshō. Only a person of utmost skill and Zen ability would be able to handle the likes of Sanshō.

Having stopped laughing, I don’t know where the laughter has gone to. But it should stir the sad wind a thousand years old. As the koan tells us, Kyōzan roared with laughter. But when his laughter stops, where has that laughter gone to? No matter how hard you look, you won’t be able to find it. We can say the same thing about ourselves. Where did we come from? Where are we going? As I often tell you, the subatomic particles flash into existence for millionths of a second, and are gone again. Where do they come from? Where do they go to? Even the Buddha could not give an answer.

There have been many interpretations given to the final line of the verse. We will never be able to find that laughter once it is gone. Since it is sad that we do not know how to find it, the verse speaks about “the sad wind.” This is one interpretation.

Or we can look at it this way: No one understands Kyōzan’s laughter, which makes Kyōzan all alone with his laughter. It must be sad to be all alone like that. The world in which Kyōzan laughed is a world which not even the Buddha, not even Bodhidharma can say a word about. It is he alone. It is just like being on the top of a mountain with no one else around. This must be sad since he alone knows.

There is the famous haiku by Bashō:

*Along this road
no one walks
This autumn evening.
(Kono michi ya
Yuku hito nashi ni
Aki no kure)*

If I wrote my own version of this haiku it would run something like this:

*Along this road
I alone walk
This autumn evening
(Kono michi ya
Ware hitori yuku
Aki no kure)*

There is definitely a certain sadness to this. This koan, as it stands, is very simple, yet can be appreciated on many levels. And the more you savor it, the more the flavor comes out.