

CASE 78

The Bodhisattvas Enter the Bath



By Yamada Kôun

Case:

In ancient times there were sixteen bodhisattvas. When it was time for the monk's bath they followed the usual procedure and entered the bath. They suddenly awakened to the essence of the water. Oh, you many Zen worthies, how do you understand it when they said, "Wondrous feeling gives forth light; we have achieved the state of Buddha's sons"? You must also go through seven and enter eight before you can understand this.

Verse:

One patchrobed monk who understands the matter is enough.
Lined up on the floor with legs stretched out and sleeping.
In a dream you once spoke about realizing perfect penetration.
Even though you wash with perfumed water, I will spit in your face.

On the Case:

This case is another of the twenty cases in the *Blue Cliff Record* lacking an Instruction. I have already discussed that lack of instructions and will not repeat myself here. I would like to mention, however, that Dai'e Sôkô Zenji, the person responsible for burning the original text, was a very great teacher in his own right and every bit as accomplished as his master. Dai'e Sôkô went to great pains to destroy the Blue Cliff Record, acting no doubt out of concern for future generations of Zen students. Nevertheless, I feel it was fortunate that this great work was saved for posterity. Such Dharma treasures do not appear every day.

The instructions which Dai'e Sôkô left for his students in the form of letters (Dai'e No Sho) are valued highly in the Rinzai sect. Although he placed great emphasis on the kensho experience, he did not meet with the full approval of Dôgen Zenji who criticized Dai'e Sôkô in his writings.

Kensho is without doubt of great importance. We could compare it to passing the examination for middle school. But, as Dôgen Zenji says, "Seeing form and making clear the mind is on the level of sticking one's head through the gate." "Seeing form and making clear the mind" means attaining kensho. Dôgen Zenji tells us that coming to kensho is just sticking our heads through the gate of the vast residence which is Zen. Up to then we had been

walking around the periphery with no idea of what was inside. With kensho, we take our first look through the gate. Dôgen Zenji tells us that kensho, a matter of course in Zen practice, should not be fussed over. From another point of view, unless we take that initial step, it will remain forever impossible to penetrate the inmost recesses of Zen. This is the position taken by modern Rinzai Zen. Both standpoints are not without their element of truth, although it would be a mistake to cling to either one of them.

The Zen of Dôgen Zenji always surveys things from a very lofty standpoint. It is for this reason that Dôgen Zenji can see attaining kensho as roughly equivalent to passing an examination for middle school. Although today's case lacks an Instruction, any Instruction from any case in this collection could be prefixed and be more than fitting. At the same time, since each Instruction speaks of Zen's highest truth while focusing all the while on the Main Case, we cannot ignore the intimate relationship existing between an Instruction and the case which follows it. In his *Hekiganshû Dokugo* (Soliloquy on the Blue Cliff Record), Yasutani Roshi supplies his own Instruction when one is lacking for a case. Much of this is no doubt based on the teishos of his own teacher, Harada Sôgaku Roshi. At any rate, Yasutani Roshi uses this as an opportunity to give us words of advice and encouragement. Let us look now at the Main Case.

On the Case:

In ancient times there were sixteen bodhisattvas. When it was time for the monk's bath they followed the usual procedure and entered the bath. They suddenly awakened to the essence of the water. Oh, you many Zen worthies, how do you understand it when they said, "Wondrous feeling gives forth light; we have achieved the state of Buddha's sons"?

Here we have sixteen Buddhas attaining realization at the same time, an event undoubtedly without precedent or repetition in Buddhist history. The story is actually found in Chapter Five of the *Surangama Sutra* [jpn.: Shûryôgonkyô], a work composed mainly of exchanges between the Buddha and his disciples where they relate the circumstances of their enlightenments. There are twenty-five such accounts in all. Among them is the one dealing with the "essence of water" [jpn.: sui-in], the story which appears as today's Main Case. In the original sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha asks each of his disciples to relate in turn the circumstances under which they came to enlightenment.

The first to reply is the bodhisattva known as Kyôshinna who is followed by the two bodhisattvas of healing, the brothers Bhaisajya-sumudgata and Bhaisajya-rajâ. Next, the bodhisattva Bhadrâpala appears as the representative of sixteen bodhisattvas to relate how they realized the essence of water. Here is how the account appears in the original text:

The sixteen bodhisattvas accompanying him rose from their seats and received the feet of the Buddha (which is what we do when we make our prostrations). They spoke to the Buddha and said, "Formerly, in the time of the Buddha Ion-ô [Sanskrit: Bhîsma-garjita-ghosa-svara-rajâ, a Buddha who lived eons before the time of Shakyamuni], we listened to the Dharma of Ion-ô Buddha and became monks. At the time of the monks' bath we

followed regular procedure and entered the bath. At that time we suddenly realized the essence of the water. Although we had not washed away dirt and we had not washed our bodies, we attained to nothingness and non-attainment in perfect peace. ... That Buddha (Ion-ô Buddha) gave me the name Bhadrapala. Wondrous feeling gives forth light; we have achieved the state of Buddha's sons."

Our five senses include those of sight, hearing and touch. We feel by touching. Here the bodhisattvas say that touching the water was absolutely wonderful. There are a number of ways of presenting the content of their experience in the dokusan room. All of the monks suddenly came to enlightenment. This is what is meant by "we have achieved the state of Buddha's sons," their way of expressing the content of their experience. They had reached the "Buddha land" or the place where the Buddha dwells. They might have even cried out, "Ah, this is the state of the Buddha!" But to return to the Main Case:

Oh, you many Zen worthies, how do you understand it when they said, "Wondrous feeling gives forth light; we have achieved the state of Buddha's sons"? You must also go through seven and enter eight before you can understand this. We ourselves are the Zen worthies. The author of the case is asking each of us how we understand this. When the bodhisattvas said, "Wondrous feeling gives forth light; we have achieved the state of Buddha's sons," they were attesting to their clear realization of the state of the Buddha. To "go through seven and enter eight" is a stock expression in Zen texts for the total freedom accompanying true realization. Such freedom is not possible unless it emerges from total emptiness. It is not until we are able to "go through seven and enter eight" (i.e., not until we have realized emptiness), that we can achieve the state of "Buddha's sons and daughters."

The sutra goes on to tell how the other disciples of the Buddha related the circumstances of their enlightenment. Among them were the bodhisattvas Subhuti, Sariputra, Samantabhadra, Upali, Mahamaudalyayana, Maitreya, the Bodhisattva Moonlight and Akasagarbha Bodhisattva. Finally the Bodhisattva Kanzeon (Avalokitesvara) appears before them and tells how "hearing" was the circumstance through which he came to realization. The word "Kanzeon" means "seeing the sounds of the world." In other words, it is coming to realization by hearing the sounds of the world with the mind's eye.

The account of Kanzeon's realization is the longest in this sutra, which also speaks of Kanzeon's great virtue by which he assumed various forms (33 different appearances) in saving sentient beings. This is slightly different from the account found in the Kannon Sutra, but the accounts are the same for the most part. They both begin by saying that Kanzeon took the form of the Buddha to preach to those who could be saved if he appeared to them in that form. He also appeared as Pratyeka-buddha, as Vipasyin Buddha, as Sravaka Buddha, and as Indra. Rather than the sound, it was the hearing itself which brought Kanzeon to enlightenment. When there is a sound, we make a distinction between the one hearing and the sound which is heard. In truth, however, they are one. In pursuing the question, "Who is it that hears?" Kanzeon could not find the one who hears although he was hearing just the same. He finally realized that it is nothing at all which hears.

After each of the bodhisattvas had taken his turn relating the circumstances of his enlightenment, Shakyamuni Buddha passed final judgment by saying that Kanzeon's was the greatest experience. The sutra text actually says that the Buddha asked Manjusri, the incarnation of wisdom, to make the final judgment and when Manjusri answered, "Kanzeon," the Buddha gave his approval to this answer. Here is perhaps one reason why devotion to Kanzeon is so widespread in the world, while the story about the sixteen bodhisattvas is scarcely known outside of this collection of koans.

It is often asked whether the Bodhisattva Kanzeon is a woman or a man. It should be known that there are times when Kanzeon appears as a man and other times when the figure appears as a woman. Essentially there is neither male or female. The incarnation of mercy is completely free in assuming the form of either one. This, too, is "going through seven and entering eight."

The most famous example in Japanese Zen history of someone coming to enlightenment in the same way as Kanzeon is Bassui Zenji, founder of Kôgakuji Temple in the town of Enzan, Yamanashi Prefecture. This temple was originally a hermitage known as Kôgaku-an, and Bassui Zenji stipulated before his death that it should not be turned into a temple. But his disciples went against his wishes and turned it into a temple anyway. I don't know for certain, but it is said that the temple facilities were destroyed several times by fire.

Originally a lay Buddhist, Bassui Zenji took orders when he was nineteen, but nevertheless refused to wear monk's robes even after his ordination. When asked why, he would say that he had not become a monk just to wear monk's robes.

Bassui Zenji is famous for his koan, "Who is it that hears?" We hear all sorts of sounds throughout the day, a fact which makes this koan easier to practice with than trying to realize the nature of water. After all, we don't spend the whole day in the bathtub! When hearing sounds, any sound will do. It can be the sound of the cicada buzzing or the bird chirping or the car engine humming. We have the greatest number of opportunities to ask ourselves, "Who is it that is hearing now?"

Many people have come to true realization following Bassui Zenji's instructions. How is your practice of Mu any different from this? When you finally grasp it, the essence is exactly the same. You can always hear sounds and you can always practice Mu. When you grasp Mu, you realize that it is the one who hears. It is enough for you to continue your practice of Mu single-mindedly. When you encounter your true self, there is nothing at all. But that emptiness is the phenomenal world itself in all its forms and appearances.

Although it is relatively easy to realize emptiness of self, realizing the emptiness of the objective world is somewhat more difficult. Only in the more vivid experiences are both realized in the same instant. In most cases, it's a matter of first realizing the emptiness of self. But, having realized that you yourself are empty, you know that no division exists between you and the objective world. The world of oneness cannot be realized until this distinction disappears. Satori is the experience of clearly realizing the world of empty oneness. In the fraction I often talk about, the denominator is zero and infinite. But the numerator (phenomena) and the denominator are not separate entities; they are one and the same. That which actually exists in the fraction is its totality. It is only for the sake of explanation that I

distinguish between numerator and denominator.

Of prime importance is clearly grasping emptiness. The *Hannya-shingyô Sutra* says, "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form." Although totally empty, it is at the same moment existing right here and now. "Form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form." This is the very essence of Buddhism, which differs from other religions in its emphasis on realizing emptiness. We cannot come to true peace of mind until we realize this. According to Buddhist teaching, when we realize emptiness, the sufferings which were plaguing us up to then will disappear. It is as if we were suddenly relieved of a heavy burden. The joy at this moment is beyond expression.

There are Catholic priests and sisters gathered here today. I have not the slightest doubt that Jesus Christ was fully aware of the world which we encounter in Zen. The Bible is filled with expressions which could not have been uttered without the experience of enlightenment. How would it be to read the Bible after having come to this experience? I leave this up to the Christians in our midst.

On the Verse:

One patchrobed monk who understands the matter is enough. If there is even one monk who has attained great enlightenment, it is enough. There is no need for sixteen monks to appear on the scene. The verses to koans are often filled with biting irony. The poet asks, "What need is there for all these bodhisattvas to be on the stage? Isn't one monk more than enough?" Indeed, the critical commentary to this line says that not even one is needed, again said in a spirit of irony.

Lined up on the floor with legs stretched out and sleeping. What else needs to be done? What need is there for anything as unnatural as satori? It's really nice just to stretch out here and go to sleep without a care in the world!

In a dream you once spoke about realizing perfect penetration. The sixteen bodhisattvas related to the Buddha how they came to enlightenment. Upon entering the bath they suddenly realized the essence of the water and grasped their true self. But the poet says they are talking in a dream.

Even though you wash with perfumed water, I will spit in your face. Anyone who makes such talk should come to me (Setchô) and, even though they have washed with perfumed water, I will spit in their faces! After all, aren't we all intrinsically Buddha from the start? What's all this talk about attaining Buddhahood upon realizing the essence of the water? Expressing this in Christian terms, we might say that we are all creatures made in the image and likeness of God. These monks are all reeking of satori. They should wash their faces with scented water and come out again. But even if they should wash their faces with perfumed water, Setchô says, he'll spit in their faces. Zen minces no words in expressing the truth.

Why is such strong language used? Even if it is, in the end, just a dream, there is a natural impulse in us all to come to true realization. But we must go on to realize this, too, for the dream that it is. We must forget everything still smelling of satori and return to our original, ordinary self. We must become human in the truest and most ultimate sense of the

world. We speak of our essence as being “perfect and lacking nothing” since it differs not at all from that of Shakyamuni or Amidha. Since we have no other way of expressing it, we use words like “Buddha” in attempting to express this truth. But “Buddha” is a name, and names are always accompanied by concepts. We must understand this point clearly.

Up to now, I have been speaking from the essential point of view. From a phenomenal standpoint, there really are Buddhas existing and we must give due respect. This matter receives a detailed exposition in the doctrine of The Three Kinds of Three Treasures.

Let me diverge from our topic here to give a brief explanation of The Three Kinds of Three Treasures. The Three Treasures are Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. But there are also three kinds of each of these Three Treasures. These are known as The Absolute Three Treasures, The Revealed Three Treasures and The Maintaining Three Treasures.

The Absolute Three Treasures transcend all relatives. The Buddha of the Absolute Three Treasures is the fact that the essence of everything is nothing at all. Buddhist terminology includes words like “Vairocana, Pure and Clear” or “Dainichi Nyorai” to express this.

The Dharma of the Absolute Three Treasures is the totality of the phenomenal world. Every single phenomenon reveals itself according to the law (dharma) of causation. According to this ultimate “law” everything in the phenomenal world comes into existence without the slightest aberration from the standard. And that which comes into existence according to this law is also known as “dharma” [jpn.: Hô].

What about The Sangha of the Absolute Three Treasures? The original meaning of “sangha” is harmonious union. This is an expression of the fact that Buddha (the Buddha of the Absolute Three Treasures, i.e. absolute emptiness) and Dharma (the Dharma of the Absolute Three Treasures) are completely one. These three together are known as “The Absolute Three Treasures.” It is The Buddha of the Absolute Three Treasures which most clearly expresses the fact that our essence is completely empty.

The second classification of The Revealed Three Treasures refers to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha which have actually appeared in this world. In the world of human beings it was Shakyamuni Buddha (although there are many other Buddhas) who first realized the fact of The Absolute Three Treasures. If Shakyamuni had not realized this, it would be the same as if The Absolute Three Treasures had never existed. Shakyamuni is our most exalted teacher who realized this fact himself and taught us about it. He is the Buddha of the Revealed Three Treasures.

The Dharma of the Revealed Three Treasures is the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. The Sangha of the Revealed Three Treasures means the disciples of the Buddha while he was still living. It is in this discipleship that the Buddha and his teachings are united. These are The Revealed Three Treasures.

A detailed explanation of the third classification of The Maintaining Three Treasures would be difficult, so I will settle here for a brief summary. One of the basic tenets here is the fact that essentially we do not die, although there is physical death. Although we no longer see the Buddha, he is truly existing right at this very moment.

The Buddha of the Maintaining Three Treasures is comprised of Shakyamuni Buddha

and his disciples as well as all people throughout history who studied Buddhism, came to enlightenment and then preached this truth to others. (This final group would be the outermost extremity of the Maintaining Three Treasures). The Buddha of the Maintaining Three Treasures also means depictions of the Buddha in statues and paintings. If it had not been for all of these, the fact that the Buddha lived and preached would remain only as a historical occurrence and not as a living truth.

The personality and teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha are maintained and transmitted down endlessly by means of The Maintaining Three Treasures. The Dharma of the Maintaining Three Treasures consists of the sutras and other written teachings. The Sangha of the Maintaining Three Treasures are the monks presently practicing in the temples. Their work is of great importance since they are entrusted with maintaining Buddha and Dharma as one and passing this on to future generations.

Although we speak of The Three Kinds of Three Treasures, the most important matter is this matter of oneness. To repeat, although there are The Absolute Three Treasures, if it were not for Shakyamuni Buddha (the Buddha of the Revealed Three Treasures) who realized this truth, it would have been the same as if they had never existed. And although Shakyamuni had spent forty-nine years preaching the dharma, if there had been no Maintaining Three Treasures to receive this and pass it on, the fact that Shakyamuni lived and preached would only remain to us as a footnote in a history book. And even granting the existence of The Maintaining Three Treasures, this would not have been possible if The Revealed Three Treasures had not existed. Nor would there have been any Revealed Three Treasures if there were no Absolute Three Treasures. It is from this fact that we realize that The Three Kinds of Three Treasures are of exactly the same value. Indeed, it is for this reason that we must pay respect to the Buddha of the Maintaining Three Treasures as it appears in the image on the altar in exactly the same way that we would revere the living Buddha of the Maintaining Three Treasures.

The reason I have covered this matter in such detail in this teisho is as follows. From the standpoint of the Absolute Three Treasures, there is the world of absolute emptiness and this is our essential nature. But from another aspect there is the revealed world which is the phenomenal world before our eyes. Nevertheless, these are actually one and the same. Thus, in the phenomenal world we must follow the ways of that world and give proper respect and honor. We must not fall into views of emptiness which would claim that “anything is all right because it’s all empty.”

Today’s verse tells us that even when we speak of satori and enlightenment, from the standpoint of The Absolute Three Treasures this has always been the case. What need is there now to start talking about satori? Anybody who says such things should go and wash his face. Even if he should wash his face with perfumed water, I will spit in his face. The verse is very strongly emphasizing the essential aspect.