

CASE 87

**Unmon's
Medicine and Sickness**



By Yamada Kôun

Instruction:

For the clear-eyed person there are no holes to fall into. Sometimes on the summit of a lonely peak the grass grows in profusion. Sometimes in the middle of the bustling marketplace he is naked and exposed. Suddenly the angry Nada reveals his three heads and six arms. Suddenly Sun-face Buddha and Moon-face Buddha release their all-embracing merciful light. The entire body is revealed in a speck of dust. He becomes ordinary people, blending with mud and mixing with water. If he were suddenly to reveal the opening of perfect enlightenment, even the eye of a Buddha could not see it. Even if a thousand sages were to appear, they would have to retreat three thousand miles. Is there anyone who has attained and realized to this degree? To test, I cite this. Look!

Case:

Unmon spoke to the assembly saying, "Medicine and sickness mutually heal. The entire universe is medicine. Where is the self?"

Verse:

The entire universe is medicine.
Formerly and nowadays, why do they err (on this point)?
He closes the door and does not make a cart.
The road is vast and empty.
Wrong, wrong.
Although the nostrils touch the sky they can still be pierced.

On the Instruction:

For the clear-eyed person there are no holes to fall into. Sometimes on the summit of a lonely peak the grass grows in profusion. Sometimes in the middle of the bustling marketplace he is naked and exposed. What is the Instruction talking about here? We usually only examine at the Case during dokusan and

omit any examination of the Instruction. Thus, it's natural that you have some trouble understanding this. But these Instructions are usually very well composed, and I find them truly convincing.

There are already quite a number of Zen texts which have been translated into English. The brothers Thomas and J. C. Cleary, for example, have produced an English translation of this *Blue Cliff Record*. But since these gentlemen evidently have not practiced Zen themselves and are just making a literal translation based on their knowledge of Chinese, there are sometimes errors in their translation. This is because there are vital parts of the *Blue Cliff Record* which cannot be understood unless a person has an enlightenment experience. If one simply translates these passages with no actual experience of what they are talking about, the chances are good that the resulting translation will not be accurate concerning the most important points. Those of you who are relying on such English translations for understanding the teisho should be aware of this. It's all right to use them as a text. But it is absolutely necessary to pass the koan in the dokusan room with me.

For the clear-eyed person there are no holes to fall into. What are the holes? Most people have those "holes" they cannot get out of. The holes of our own delusions, and sometimes the holes of the idle pastimes we devote so much time to without being able to free ourselves of them. But for the clear-eyed person, that is, a person who has come to true enlightenment, there are no such holes to fall into. All attachments have fallen away. The next lines tell about the everyday life of such a person.

Sometimes on the summit of a lonely peak the grass grows in profusion. The summit of a lonely peak is the state of perfect enlightenment where there is "not a speck of cloud in the sky." While perfectly aware of this world of satori, "the grass grows in profusion," which is to say, he or she is busy from morning to night saving all beings. To save all beings is not possible in the world of satori. That world is totally empty; there are no beings to save. It is like being alone on a desert island. Even if you should wish to save others there is no one to save; religious activity is impossible.

A person who has truly realized emptiness must then return to the phenomenal world of self-and-other where there are many people to save. He or she must work there with the desire to somehow bring all these people to true peace. This is what is meant by the grass growing in profusion. There are any number of people who are working to save others without having themselves experienced the world of emptiness in satori. But as far as Zen is concerned, it must be a case of experiencing the world of satori yourself and then working to save others.

Sometimes in the middle of the bustling marketplace he is naked and exposed. Even in the middle of the bustling Ginza or Akasuka or Shinjuku, the completely enlightened person is naked and exposed. Of course, this does not mean that he or she is standing there without any clothes on. That person is just as he or she is, without frills and without putting on a show of great wisdom or enlightenment. There are almost no

enlightened people among that great bustle. But, if an enlightened person were in their midst and put on an air of being something special, this would be most repulsive. It is what I am referring to when I speak of "Zen sickness." The truly enlightened person is "naked and revealed," there is nothing of enlightenment about that person. Amid the bustling crowd the person is just as he or she is with a completely open heart.

I would like to relate here a story which makes an important point in regard to this. Nakagawa Sôen Roshi, who recently passed away, acted in his younger days as an attendant to Yamamoto Gempô Roshi (a Zen master whose equal would be hard to find). The following events took place in the confused period just after Japan's defeat in the Pacific War. One day the two of them were traveling by train on their way back to the temple. Because of the situation after the war, the trains were terribly crowded, with people literally boarding and leaving the trains through the windows! Gempô Roshi and the young Sôen had managed to find a seat in all this confusion. With people pressing in all around them, Gempô Roshi made himself as inconspicuous as possible in the corner. Sôen-san, however, sat on the train seat practicing zazen with all his effort within full view of everyone around him. When they got back to the temple, Gempô Roshi asked Sôen-san to come to his room where he scolded the younger monk severely for his behavior on the train. "What do you think you're doing, sitting there in zazen like that with the train so crowded? In such a situation, you should try to make yourself as inconspicuous as possible." Sôen-san took this scolding in absolute silence.

The story was related by Masuda Kôzô, master of *shôgi* (Japanese chess), in *Daihôrin* (Great Dharma Wheel), a popular magazine on Buddhist topics here in Japan. Masuda was in the vicinity at the time this event took place and was very moved by Gempô Roshi's teaching. Masuda Kôzô was on very good terms with Gempô Roshi. One time, he happened to be watching from behind as the Roshi climbed a flight of stairs. He took one look at the Roshi's bearing and said to himself, "Now here is a 'meijin'¹ in the true sense of the word, a 'meijin' of life." After this he would continually refer to Gempô Roshi as "meijin," even asking if "meijin" were there when he came to call on the Roshi.

The reason I brought this story up is to emphasize how important it is to be completely natural, giving off no odor of being great, even in the most bustling, crowded circumstances. The next part of the Instruction presents us with various aspects of the truly enlightened person.

Suddenly the angry Nada reveals his three heads and six arms. Suddenly Sun-face Buddha and Moon-face Buddha release their all-embracing merciful light. "The angry Nada" was a guardian deity in Buddhist lore, and the eldest son of Vaisravana. He is typically represented with three faces and eight arms. One tradition has it that he is a demon king who appears holding a different weapon in each of his many hands. Probably the former view is more fitting. At any rate, sometimes this Nada appears with a show of incredible anger. Other times Sun-faced Buddha and Moon-faced Buddha ~~he~~ appear,

¹ "Meijin" is the word used in both *gô* and *shôgi* to refer to a **great** master of the game.

sending forth merciful light to everyone. Sun-faced Buddha and Moon-faced Buddha are found in the sutra which lists the three thousand names of the Buddha. This koan collection also includes the koan entitled "Master Ba Is Unwell":

*Master Ba was unwell. The head monk asked, "How is your Reverence feeling lately?"
The Master said, "Sun-faced Buddha, Moon-faced Buddha."*

Master Ba was lying ill on his deathbed. The head monk of the temple came and asked how he was feeling that day. Master Ba answered, "Sun-faced Buddha, Moon-faced Buddha." (Sun-faced Buddha has a long life of 1,800 years; in contrast, Moon-faced Buddha has a very short life, only a day and a night.) This answer of Master Ba's is taken up as a koan in the dokusan room.

"The all embracing merciful light" is a reference to how the myriad Buddhas have only one task, that of saving all beings. They send out their mercy to everything in the universe. Usually we don't attempt to give aid unless we feel a particular connection with the object of the aid. For example, in the case of this zendo, I sometimes have total strangers writing me or telephoning out of the blue, saying that they wish to meet me or to practice Zen here. Due to space limitations at this zendo, I am not in the habit of accepting new students unless they have been properly introduced. This is probably because I am not yet a Buddha! That is to say, Buddhas send out their mercy to everything in the universe regardless of whether or not there is any particular connection with them.

The entire body is revealed in a speck of dust. Such a thing is impossible unless you have had an enlightenment experience yourself. The world of satori is governed by the principle that "everything is one and one is everything." Thus, a speck of dust is the whole universe and the entire universe is included in a speck of dust. Why? Because they are both completely empty. To realize emptiness is the ultimate goal of Buddhism. The *Hannya-shingyô Sutra* says, "Form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form. Form is only emptiness, emptiness only form." This is the essence of Buddhism. Everything in the phenomenal world is totally empty. Where there is total emptiness there is the tree, the flower, the mountain and so on. As I always say, this is the ultimate point of Buddhism. (I do wish that the foreign students here would learn at least the *Hannya-shingyô*.) The entire universe is contained in a tiny grain of sand. This is the true fact of existence but it cannot be understood other than through an authentic satori experience.

He becomes ordinary people, blending with mud and mixing with water. This means being able to mix with ordinary beings and ordinary life without attempting to force your opinions on others. While seeing the essential world clearly you become one with ordinary unenlightened beings in the task of saving all beings. You don't belittle the opinions of others or try to show off your own knowledge. You don't treat others as fools. Nor do you make a distinction between yourself and those who are less fortunate. Rather you blend in with all of these, the ugly and the poor, the weak and the downtrodden. It is blending with mud and mixing with water. Bassui Zenji's writings include a work entitled *Wadei Gassui*

Shû ("Collection of Blending with Mud and Mixing with Water")². It would be good if you could all take a look at this work.

In other words, the person who has attained great enlightenment and then gone on to completely forget that enlightenment, having become a completely natural person beyond learning and attainment. This should be our goal in Zen practice, to become completely ordinary in the deepest sense of the word.

If he were suddenly to reveal the opening of perfect enlightenment, even the eye of a Buddha could not see it. If you can open it up completely in public without shutting yourself up in your own little world, even the Buddhas will not be able to see you. Even if a thousand Buddhas were to appear before such a person, they would have to retreat far in the distance. Why? Because we are talking about the total emptiness we realize in true Zen experience. Even Shakyamuni or Bodhidharma are no match here. If there is the slightest intellection going on in your head you are far indeed from the truth.

The Instruction up to now has been describing that person who has come to complete enlightenment. The emphasis is, of course, on Unmon who appears in the main case. This can all be seen as effusive praise for Unmon Daishi.

Is there anyone who has attained and realized to this degree? To test, I cite this. Look! Is there anyone who has attained this same degree of enlightenment and who has this same state of enlightened consciousness? An example will now be given and we are asked to examine it carefully. A long introduction to the very short main case which now follows.

On the Case:

Unmon spoke to the assembly saying, "Medicine and sickness mutually heal. The entire universe is medicine. Where is the self?" "Medicine and sickness mutually heal" means that the medicine corresponds to the sickness. This medicine is good for this sickness, another medicine for another illness, and so on. However, now the entire universe is medicine. We would expect Unmon to ask, "Where is sickness?" since the entire universe is medicine. But instead he hits us with "What is the self?" Unless you have realized your true self you will not be able to answer Unmon.

There have been many interpretations offered for Unmon's first statement about medicine and sickness mutually healing, and how the universe is medicine. I prefer to see this as Unmon doing his best to throw his audience into confusion before he hits them with the final question. As I said, when Unmon says the entire universe is medicine, you naturally expect him to ask, "Where is sickness?" Instead he asks, "What is the self?" The first statement stirs up ideas in our heads about one-to-one correspondence. But then he suddenly shifts his position and hits us with a thunderbolt. Unless you have realized this self, you cannot answer

² English translation: *Mud and Water, A Collection of Talks by the Zen Master Bassui*, transl. by Arthur Braverman, North Point Press, San Francisco, 1989.

Unmon. Unmon's question is a fearful one. I'd love to tell all of you the answer, but I can't do that here! What is the self?

On the Verse:

The entire universe is medicine. In former times and nowadays, why have they erred (on this point)? Unmon said that the entire universe is medicine, and from times of old most people have been snagged here for the reasons I just mentioned. After his first statements, most people are expecting him to ask, "Where is sickness?" and are thrown into confusion when he does not. Thus, as the second line of the Verse says, they have erred on this point, so they are unable to answer Unmon's question to his satisfaction.

He closes the door and does not make a cart. The original appears in the Chinese classic work *Wen-hsüan* [jpn.: *Monzen*], a collection of varied works compiled in the Liang Dynasty. The line appears as follows in the original:

He closes the door and makes the cart.

He goes out the door and fits it in the tracks.

In the cities of ancient China the width of the roads was decreed and there were actual grooves in the road where the wheels of the carts were to travel. If one is already familiar with such settled matters, there is certainly no need to go out now and measure the width of the road. One can close the door and build the cart right in the house, and it will fit right in the tracks. In today's Verse, however, it says, "he closes the door and *does not* make the cart." Here we are talking about the world where there are no rules or measurements of any kind, the world of complete emptiness. If you are building a cart you have to consider whether it will fit the grooves in the road and other matters. There are many rules which you must give attention to. This is the discriminating by which we lose our original freedom. If you do not make a cart you are completely free in your movement and there is no need to worry about fitting it into the grooves. This is using the other words to speak about the world of emptiness encountered in satori, the world where there are no rules.

In his *Fukanzazengi* (General Recommendation of Zazen) Dôgen Zenji says,

"The Way is intrinsically complete, what need is there to practice and come to enlightenment?"

In the same spirit, as long as there are rules about what to do and not to do, it is still only halfway. Dôgen Zenji speaks to us from the standpoint of the essential, the world of total emptiness where there is no practice and enlightenment. Likewise, the *Shinjinmei* (Verses on Believing in Mind) of the Third Patriarch Sôsan Daishi starts out as follows:

The Supreme Way is not difficult,

It only dislikes picking and choosing.

Jôshû Oshô was very fond of these words and quoted them on every possible occasion. They are said in basically the same spirit as those of Dôgen Zenji. The ultimate way is extremely easy. The great way under heaven is not limited in passage to only a few. Both emperors and

commoners can go this way with no obstruction, as can oxen and horses. This is what is meant by “vast and empty” in the next line of the verse.

The road is naturally vast and empty. It is just like a cloudless blue sky. The road is intrinsically free for us to travel. Even mention practice and coming to enlightenment and you have already lost that freedom. Nevertheless, unless you come to enlightenment you can never understand the truth of this statement! You will be caught in your concepts and will never experience that freedom. It is only when we have gone on and forgotten that satori experience, when the sparkle and sheen of satori have completely disappeared, that we become our original natural selves in complete freedom. This is what we are all striving for. To sum up what I have been saying so far, if we can avoid building a cart, the road is open and free for us to walk. It is truly “vast and empty.” You cannot get any freer than this.

But then Setchô suddenly stops what he has been saying so far. Wrong, wrong. Although the nostrils touch the sky they can still be pierced through. No, it is not yet the real thing, he tells us. This is Setchô’s way of checking himself in his own self-assured proclamations and saying that there is still a long way for him to go.

The Main Case of this koan is simplicity itself, a mere handful of words. In contrast, the Instruction and Verse are quite difficult. Never forget, though, that the real meat of the koan is found in the Main Case. “What is the self?” Unmon asks us. This is the most basic question. When you practice Mu single-mindedly there will come an instant when you realize what Mu is and at the same time realize what the self is. This is what we are attempting to do. To grasp the self.

When I’m in the midst of giving a teisho I sometimes tend to get carried away by the force of my own argument. But when I finish I often feel ashamed for talking so much. Nevertheless, it’s necessary for me to talk. If it is at all a help to you in your practice, nothing could make me happier.