

HEKIGANROKU

(BLUE CLIFF RECORD)



CASE 95

Chôkei's Three Poisons

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Instruction:

Do not stay where there is Buddha. If you stay, horns will grow from your head. Run quickly past where there is no Buddha. If you do not run past, the grass will be ten feet high. Even if you are completely naked and clean so that there is no activity outside of the matter and no matter outside of the activity, you will not avoid looking at a stump waiting for a rabbit. Just tell me. When you are not any of these, how will you act? To test, I bring this up. Look!

Case:

Chôkei once said, "Even if you say that an Arhat has the three poisons, do not say that the Tathagata has two kinds of speech. I do not say that the Tathagata has no speech, only that there are not two kinds of speech." Hofuku said, "What is the speech of the Tathagata?" Chôkei said, "How could a deaf man hear it?" Hofuku said, "Now I see that you are speaking from the second principle." Chôkei said, "What is the speech of the Tathagata?" Hofuku said, "Have some tea."

Verse:

First and second principle.

A reclining dragon does not prefer stagnant water.

Where there is nothing there is the moon and the waves are clear.

Where there is something there is no wind and the waves rise up.

Elder Ryô, Elder Ryô!

In March at the Gate of Yu, you failed to make the grade.

We could say that a koan always appears as an intertwining of the phenomenal and essential worlds. The same is true for this koan.

Chôkei and Hofuku, the two protagonists in today's koan, were both students of Seppô and more than a match for each other when it came to enlightened understanding. In this particular case, Chôkei plays the role of the loser and Hofuku appears as the better of the two. Actually, however, they are just following the "rules," so to speak, of such a Zen exchange. Neither of them is really inferior to the other. This is important to keep in mind in appreciating this koan. Although Chôkei might appear to be the loser that is only the case insofar as we are caught up in the world of phenomena and fail to see the other side of things.

On the Instruction:

Do not stay where there is Buddha. If you stay, horns will grow

from your head. Run quickly past where there is no Buddha. If you do not run past, the grass will be ten feet high. The Instruction speaks of "where there is Buddha" and "where there is no Buddha." It could be expressed just as well in terms of "having" and "not having," or being and nonbeing. We are warned against seeing only the aspect of having, of phenomena. For if we do, horns will grow from our heads; concepts and thoughts will arise. However, the Instruction then goes on to tell us the exact opposite. We should also run past where there is no Buddha. This speaks of the essential world where there is not one thing. Evidently the discussion is about ideas of emptiness. When you practice Mu to the point where both you and Mu disappear, you realize a world of total emptiness. And here is the Instruction telling us to run right past it, having once encountered that world. Where are we to run to, then? To the world of phenomena from which we came. For if we remain in the world of emptiness, "the grass will be ten feet high." The grass will be so high that we cannot get out, and we will remain prisoners in that world of emptiness.

Even if you are completely naked and clean so that there is no activity outside of the matter and no matter outside of the activity, you will not avoid looking at a stump waiting for a rabbit. "Naked and clean" here refers to our essential self with nothing sticking. We are "clean" in the sense of having no concepts. Human beings are all too apt to become "dirtied" with their own concepts, thereby losing their essential purity. We use thoughts and concepts to conduct our everyday lives. Most people believe this habit of thought to be a good thing in itself and fail to see how thought is the root of illusion. There is almost no one who is aware of the other aspect of reality, the aspect of its essential emptiness. Nevertheless, there are some who will come upon Zen books or hear a Zen teisho and suspect that there is another side to things in addition to that which they can see. This could be compared to having lived our lives in a dark room surrounded by thick black glass, until the time comes when we suspect that there is another world beyond that little room. We then begin to drill slowly through the thick glass, strengthened by the conviction that we will eventually see what is on the other side. This is the practice of Mu.

Eventually the moment comes when we drill through the glass and are able to see through to the other side. Since the hole is still very small we cannot see very much of the adjoining room. Nevertheless, we know of its existence beyond any doubt. This is the initial kensho experience. As the saying goes, "Buddhas and patriarchs have not deceived me."

We are then given koan after koan as themes for our practice following kensho. This is the process whereby we gradually enlarge that hole to the point where we eventually eliminate the glass entirely. As our practice deepens we are able to see more and more of the adjoining room until we can see everything with perfect clarity. We then go on to realize that there had never been any glass to begin with. This is great enlightenment.

The adjoining room which we encounter when we break through the glass is the essential world, the world of our essential nature. Zen practice is the means by which we are able to encounter that world for ourselves.

Sad to say, however, true enlightenment experiences are becoming fewer and fewer as time goes on. There are people who have finished the entire course of koan study and who still do not know the first thing about Zen.

The adjoining room I was speaking about in my analogy is "where there is no Buddha," to use the words of the Instruction. It is the essential world where there is nothing at all. The room we are in at the outset is "where there is Buddha," the world of phenomena. But there are actually not two rooms. I started out by saying there was a wall of thick black glass separating two different rooms (which is itself an illusion since there is no glass to begin with), but there is actually only the single room.

At the outset of my explanation I mentioned that "where there is Buddha" is the phenomenal aspect while "where there is no Buddha" is the essential aspect. Actually, however, there has been a strong tendency throughout the history of Zen to comprehend emptiness intellectually. Thus, when a person reports an experience, it is extremely important for the Zen teacher to distinguish between an authentic, direct experience of emptiness and a mere conceptualization thereof. This will be impossible, of course, unless the teacher himself or herself has had a clear experience. For it is your own experience which you must use as the criterion for judging the experiences of others. Here is the reason why it is so crucial for the person acting in the role of Zen teacher to strive to go ever deeper in his or her understanding of this world of oneness.

Nevertheless, the Instruction tells us, even if we are completely free of all concepts and thoughts and are appearing and acting in our original essence (being so and acting so are two different things), this is still not enough. In the expression "activity outside of the matter," "the matter," according to Yasutani Roshi, means the objective world, while "activity" means the subjective world.

In my opinion, to say "no activity outside of the matter" means that there is only the objective world and no subject. Conversely, when we say "no matter outside of the activity" we are concentrating on the subjective to the exclusion of the objective. In other words, we are speaking of the world of satori, the world about which we can say "where there is nothing there is the limitless storehouse." It is the world where subject and object are one. If we speak in terms of object there is only object and no subject. If we speak in terms of subject there is only subject and no object.

The world of thought is known here as "the second level." Zen is concerned with "the first level," the world of direct experience with absolutely no thoughts mixed in. The world of thought, by its very nature, depends on dividing things into two. This is a world of illusion since there is really no such division. Thus, to view things as separated into self and other or subject and object is to live in delusion. The world of satori and Zen is always the world of oneness.

A passing glance at the koans might lead us to falsely assume that they are concerned with dividing things into two. On the contrary, koans will defy all attempts at understanding if we do not view them from the standpoint of oneness.

To grasp oneness you must first clearly grasp emptiness. I am always using the example of my own hands in attempts to explain this. I have a right hand and a left hand. Seen in terms of phenomena there is no way that they can be said to be one and the same. There are clearly two different hands. However, viewed from the standpoint of the single life in them, both my right hand and my left hand could be said to be living the same single life. From the standpoint of life, they are one.

Life has neither form nor color. It is totally empty. Nevertheless, it has limitless capabilities among which we could list the natural healing power which the body possesses. There is no way we could deny the existence of life. But where is it? We know that it is filling my whole body, but there is no way we can separate life from the body. It is empty in the sense that it cannot be grasped by our senses.

Thus, the expression in the Instruction, "outside of the matter there is no activity" means that, when we consider things in their essence, whenever there is object there is only object and no subject. When there is subject there is only subject and no object. Both lines are actually talking about the same thing.

Nevertheless, says the Instruction, even if you realize this, it is still not enough. It is just like "looking at a stump waiting for a rabbit." This expression has its origin in an old Chinese tale. One day, as a farmer was tilling his fields, a rabbit ran full speed into a tree stump and died. Seeing this, the foolish farmer concluded that it would be better to give up farming and stand by this "rabbit-catching stump" for the next rabbit to make his livelihood. In like manner, if we think that enlightenment is going to happen by itself without our doing anything we are as foolish as the farmer. Even if we have some understanding that subject and object are one, it will never do to stop there. The minute we stop, there will be no further progress in our practice.

Just tell me. When you are not any of these, how will you act? To test, I bring this up. Look! Even if we have thrown away everything that has been said so far as dealing with illusion, how will our daily actions change? What is an example of true enlightenment? We will now be presented with just such an example.

On the Case:

Chôkei once said, "Even if you say that an Arhat has the three poisons, do not say that the Tathagata has two kinds of speech. I do not say that the Tathagata has no speech, only that there are not two kinds of speech." An Arhat is a saint in the Hinayana Buddhist tradition. These are people who have completely rid themselves of the three poisons of greed, anger and folly. Thus, it is impossible to speak of an Arhat having the three poisons. However, Chôkei says, even granted that an Arhat has the three poisons, itself an impossibility, the Tathagata does not have two kinds of speech. "Two kinds of speech" means to be double-tongued, to say one thing and mean another. Chôkei tells us that

although the Tathagata had something to say, he never told a lie. This is a fact, for if two different things were said that would already be the world of duality, the world of illusion. Since the Buddha is always in the world of satori and thus of oneness, there can never be two kinds of speech.

Hofuku said, "What is the speech of the Tathagata?" Chôkei said, "How could a deaf man hear it?" Hofuku said, "Now I see that you are speaking from the second principle." Hofuku immediately wanted to hear the single speech of the Buddha Tathagata. Chôkei counters with, "How could a deaf man hear it?" Even if I were to tell you, you could not hear it since you are deaf. In response to this, Hofuku says, "Now I see that you are speaking from the second principle." "The second principle" is the world of concepts and thinking, the world of subject and object; in short, the world of illusion. Hofuku says this because Chôkei, with his statement, has made a division into two, a division into those who can hear and those who cannot. Hofuku tells Chôkei that he is speaking from the world of duality.

It might appear at this point that Chôkei has emerged the loser in this exchange. But what happens now? Chôkei said, "What is the speech of the Tathagata?" Hofuku said, "Have some tea." It is now Chôkei's turn to ask to hear the speech of the Tathagata. Hofuku wastes not an instant in replying, "Drink some tea." This is the speech of the Tathagata. The expression "drink some tea" (in Japanese: *kissako*) has gone on to become quite famous in tea circles in Japan. You will often find hanging scrolls with this inscription when you are invited to the tea ceremony.

Nevertheless, it would be a great mistake to conclude that the words of the Buddha are limited to "have some tea." As I am constantly telling you, each and every phenomenon is itself the totality of the essential world¹. If you think that this is just a stick, you are wrong; it is the entire universe. The same could be said for any words we say, for example, "Katsu!" Any word from our mouth is itself the essential world. "Have some tea." That's it.

Thus, going one step further, we could say that every single word which either Chôkei or Hofuku uttered during their exchange was itself the speech of the Tathagata. If you say that the essential world is found in the speech of the Buddha, every single word is the speech of the Buddha. Thus, when Chôkei says, "how could a deaf man hear it" or when Hofuku says, "I realize that you are speaking in the second principle," these individual phrases are the essential itself. You must clearly realize this. This is what makes this koan interesting.

No, it is not only "have some tea" which is the speech of the Tathagata. The same holds for "Good morning," "good-bye" or "see you later," or what have you.

On the Verse:

First and second principle. A reclining dragon does not prefer stagnant water. Yasutani Roshi goes into some detail in his *Soliloquy on the Blue*

¹ Roshi holds up his stick.

Cliff Record [Hekiganshû Dokugo] concerning this initial line of the verse. I quote from his comments.

This is making use of the technique of inversion or anastrophe in which the word order is inverted. The actual meaning is first and second principle. Nevertheless, if you are thinking in terms of Chôkei in the second principle and Hofuku in the first principle, you do not see their true state of consciousness. [Yamada's comment: Yasutani Roshi seems to be sticking up for Chôkei here, saying that although it might appear on the surface that Chôkei is the loser, this is not so]. When it is Chôkei's turn to play the loser he executes his role in fine style. If he were incapable of playing his role, there would be no play at all. Are you protesting that it is only a play? Don't be foolish! The play presents us with the real fact. You are not representing what isn't so. In inopportune circumstances if you do not lead the army there will be no battle. Many are the scholars who say that Hofuku is of the first principle and that Chôkei falls into the second principle. It is because they concentrate on dead phrases that they fail to see the living dragon.

Yasutani Roshi is no doubt right in what he says. As I just mentioned, it would be a mistake to conclude that either Hofuku or Chôkei is superior to the other in terms of Zen understanding. Although there is this temporary division into first and second principle there is never two from the standpoint of the essential. There is no second principle in the essential world. The phenomenal world, viewed from the essential standpoint, is totally empty.

The "reclining dragon" may appear to be sleeping but it is actually very much alive and capable of anything. Such a totally alive dragon will never be found in stagnant water. The water must be flowing constantly, otherwise it will stagnate. A really living dragon will never be found in still, stagnant water. Look for him in a rolling stream or in the great ocean.

Where there is nothing there is the moon and the waves are clear. Where there is something there is no wind and the waves rise up. Elder Ryô, Elder Ryô! In March at the Gate of Yu, you received a failing mark. "Where there is nothing" means the world of emptiness. Since it is completely empty there is not a single wave, it is totally still. The moon is reflected perfectly upon the still surface of the water. The moon is a metaphor for satori.

Nevertheless, if you take up residence in that world of perfect stillness you are mistaken. No religious activity is possible in such a world. There are no sentient beings to save since it is completely empty. It will not do to remain in that world of emptiness. Yasutani Roshi comments:

Those who remain there are 'dead men of the highest order.' Only the moon of satori is shining and there are no sentient beings to save even if you wanted to. You are lying there taking a nap with the waves of concern (for others) completely stilled. It is of absolutely no

use.

It is of course absolutely necessary to realize the world of satori. But having done so we must return to the world of "you and me," of subject and object. This is referred to in the *Five Ranks* as *Gukô* (The Rank of Double Merit). It is meritorious to have reached the world of satori. But it is equally meritorious to return to the ordinary world. There must be both, otherwise it is not real.

Where there is something there is no wind and the waves rise up.

This is the phenomenal world, the world of illusion. This world is actually completely empty but waves are rising constantly. This is a good description of our own spirits. Although there is nothing at all, there are constant waves rising in the form of happiness, sadness, dejection, anger. To say there is no wind is to focus on the essential emptiness of all things and feelings.

The present state of international relations could also be viewed in the same way. The tensions existing between the U.S. and the Soviet Union are essentially empty, although the waves of antagonism continue to rise without any end in sight.

Elder Ryô, Elder Ryô! In March at the Gate of Yu, you received a failing mark. "Elder Ryô" is Chôkei, whose actual name was E-Ryô. The final line has its origin in Chinese folklore. There is a section of the Yellow River known as the *Three Grades of the Gate of Yu* since there is a three-tiered waterfall there. According to tradition, in the early spring when the peach blossoms are blooming, the carp in the river will swim up the waterfall. Those carp which succeed in swimming up the three tiers of the waterfall turn into dragons and climb up into the heavens. Among the carp climbing up the waterfall are those which fall down on the rocks below and are washed down to the bottom again. Chôkei is compared in the Verse to those carp which fail to "make the grade," so to speak. By the answers he gave in the exchange and the way in which Hofuku replied to them, Chôkei failed to make the grade of dragon. In the end, says the Verse, he was still just a carp.

Commenting on this final line, Yasutani Roshi once again takes Chôkei's side, saying that he was truly outstanding nonetheless:

The poet has to say what he does since this is where his poem is leading. This is where we have to keep our eye out for Setchô's (the poet's) great ability in teaching others.

This concludes what I want to say about this case. One matter I wish to emphasize here is that the ordinary world of subject and object, the world of common sense, is not the real world, although this is the world which most people take to be reality. It is not just the world which appears to be there on the movie screen. But you must be aware that there is another side to things, the essential aspect. There is both the phenomenal aspect and the essential aspect to reality. The same reality seen from different standpoints can be the phenomenal world of color and shape or the essential world of not one thing. You must keep in mind that Zen must always be considered in light of these two aspects of the same single reality.