

HEKIGANROKU
(BLUE CLIFF RECORD)



CASE 100

Haryo's Sharpest Sword

By YAMADA Kôun

Instruction:

For the whole summer I have been loquaciously creating entanglements. I have confused almost all the monks of the Five Lakes. But when the diamond sword cuts right through, I realize for the first time that the hundred up to now have been in vain. Just say. What is the diamond sword? Lift up your eyebrows. To test, I will expose the tip for you. Look!

Case:

A monk asked Haryô, "What is the sharpest sword?" Haryô said, "Each coral branch reflects the moon."

Verse:

It is necessary to smooth out that which is uneven.
The most skillful seems like lack of skill.
Sometimes it's a finger, sometimes a fist.
Leaning on heaven and shining on the snow.
A master blacksmith cannot beat it down.
A great craftsman cannot finish polishing it.
There is something else.
Each coral branch reflects the moon.

I must admit that reaching this final case of the Blue Cliff Record fills me with emotion. It is no small thing to finish teisho on 100 cases.

On the Instruction:

Various theories have been proposed over the centuries regarding the instruction for this case. Many commentators say that the instructions for Case 98 and Case 100 were switched with each other. This would explain why the instruction usually appended to Case 98 seems so fitting for today's case. I have already told you how the original version of the *Blue Cliff Record* was later burned by Master Daie (a disciple of Engo Zenji, the final author of the work) out of fears that it would lead to intellectualizing but then later recovered by his successors. This turn of events could well explain why there are no

instructions for certain cases and why these two instructions were inserted in the wrong order.

Among former Zen masters who have opted for using the instruction for Case 98 when presenting the present case there is Fûgai Oshô (an outstanding Japanese Soto master of the Tokugawa Period). Iida Toin Roshi mentioned this possibility, although he resorted to commonly accepted order when he wrote his own teisho on the case. In the Rinzai Sect there was the extremely fine master Imazu Kôgaku who made a point of using the instruction for Case 98 when speaking about Case 100. Both Yasutani Roshi and another former teacher of mine, Asahina Sôgen Roshi, follow convention in their own books by leaving the instructions as they appear in the Blue Cliff Record.

Reading the instructions and cases on my own, I too feel that the instruction for Case 98 is extremely fitting for the final case in the collection and it is for this reason that I will use the instruction usually appended to Case 98 as the instruction for today's case.

I start out today by reading the main case: "A monk asked Haryô, 'What is the sharpest sword?' Haryô said, 'Each coral branch reflects the moon.'"

Haryô Zenji was a disciple of Unmon Daishi, founder of the Unmon sect and a man of great literary gifts. Haryô went on to become great in his own right although in his younger days he was evidently very fond of talking. Nevertheless, Unmon Daishi was well aware of his disciple's abilities. The famous "Three Turning Words" of Haryô, of which today's case forms the last, were actually presented by Haryô to his master. Here are all three:

- a. (1) What is the Deva Sect?
(2) Snow in a silver bowl.
- b. (1) What is the way?
(2) The clearly enlightened man falls in a well.
- c. (1) What is the sharpest sword?
(2) The dew on top of each coral branch reflects the light of the moon.

When examining these in the dokusan room as part of the miscellaneous koans I do not cover them in much depth. I have no choice at that point but to be content when the student has an understanding of the surface meaning. This is because it almost always just after kensho that a student examines the miscellaneous koans. In a certain sense, these people are still "babies" to the world of Zen and there is a need to meet them at their own level. Today, however, we are looking at these words as the final case in the Hekiganroku and I want to present this in a very straightforward manner.

Having said so, I must admit that it's very difficult to express the real marrow of this koan in words. Iida Tôin Roshi had the following to say, "After having savored this koan time after time you will get the feeling that you understand it a little. There is nothing you can do except wait for this to happen." In the same spirit, I can only present to you what I myself have savored so far and ask you to listen in the same way.

For the whole summer I have been loquaciously creating entanglements. In his *Hekigan-shu Dokugo* ("Soliloquy on the Blue Cliff Record") Yasutani Roshi comments as follows, "There are some people, among them Hakuin Zenji, who say that this instruction (for Case 98) was confused with the one for Case 100. Maybe they're right. Then again, maybe not."

In China of old, the ninety-day period from April 15th to July 15th was a time when monks did not go outside but gathered in one place for intensive practice. Since this period corresponds to the rainy season in India this practice probably had its start much earlier and was later adopted by Chinese monasteries. The period is known as "Ge-ango" in which "Ge" means summer and "Ango" means to "remain in one place." It is also referred to as "U-Ango" where "U" means rain.

It was the custom to count the number of Ango a monk had participated in when calculating his "age" as monk. Thus even a monk who was older in years might be considered young if he had not participated in many Angô. This age was known as "Horô" or "Sorô" in which the "Rô" refers to the month of December, the end of the year.

"Entanglements" (Japanese: "kattô") usually refers to koans when it appears in Zen texts. Here it means words in general and emphasizes how Haryô has been talking the whole summer long.

I have confused almost all the monks of the Five Lakes. "The monks of the Five Lakes" is a reference to an area in Central China where five great lakes are located. There were once many outstanding masters gathered in that area and, quite naturally, many monks flocked there for instruction. The original Chinese word in the text translated as "confuse" also means "to tie up." With his talking, Haryô says, he has thrown the monks into confusion. He speaks in a spirit of modesty.

But when the diamond sword cuts right through. But then there is the diamond sword which is sharp enough to cut through anything. It is the sword of our essential nature. What is left when all entanglements have been cut through?

I realize for the first time that the hundred up to now have been in vain. The author of the Blue Cliff Record tells us: "I have given teisho on ninety-nine cases up to now, but now I realize that this was a complete waste of time. I have been saying all sorts of things much in the way that you entertain a child with toys. But when you cut through all this with the diamond sword, the real thing comes forth. And seen in the light of the truth, I realize clearly that all which I have said concerning these ninety-nine cases was completely in vain." Particularly when reading this part of the instruction, I cannot help but feel that this instruction was originally intended for the final case of this collection.

Just say. What is the diamond sword? Lift up your eyebrows. To test, I will expose the tip for you. Look! We are told in no uncertain terms to look carefully at the main case. Let us do just that.

On the Case:

A monk asked Haryô, "What is the sharpest sword?" Haryô said, "Each coral branch reflects the moon." The coral is you yourself. The coral has many branches and the water on the tip of each branch reflects the moon. But what is this all about? First of all, what is the diamond sword? As I mentioned, this is your essential nature which is itself the world of phenomena. I am constantly telling you that the essential world and the phenomenal world are one. The light of the moon is essential nature which has neither form nor shape; it is totally empty. This is why it can cut through anything. How does it cut?

For example, this stick is black. Everyone can distinguish between white and black. That is the diamond sword cutting perfectly. What are other examples? The mountain is high, the river is low. Moment to moment it is completely clear, moment to moment it cuts perfectly. Mountain, river, black, white, stick, pillar...each time there is no mistake. The light of the moon is nothing other than your essential nature. Everything is contained in the light of the moon. You could also say that everything is contained within the sharpest sword since that is just another name for essential nature. Please take the time to savor this deeply. You may think that you understand, but it's surprisingly difficult to come to a clear understanding of this matter.

As I am always telling you, the back of my hand can be seen as the phenomenal world and the palm of my hand as the essential world. As long as we are attempting to understand this logically, there is no way we can see the phenomenal world and the essential world as one. It is only when we have savored this fully that we can understand that they are truly one. When I move my hand like this, it is not only the phenomenal hand which moves but also the essential hand. That is why I often use a fraction to explain the phenomenal and the essential.

The real fact is the numerator and the denominator enclosed in a circle to show that they are not separate but the same single fact. "Each coral branch reflects the moon." That itself is the fraction enclosed in the circle.

On the Verse:

It is necessary to smooth out that which is uneven. "Smoothing out that which is uneven" means gaining true peace of mind. The only way to do this is to realize your true self. This is the reason that we are devoting ourselves so fervently to zazen.

The most skillful seems like lack of skill. People like me who are not versed in the ways of modern art are apt to look at a picture by an acknowledged master and see not much difference from a child's scribble. In like manner, unless you are on truly good terms with the world of Zen, the actions of an accomplished master might seem very unskillful to you. Haryô's reply, "Each coral branch reflects the moon," is of almost childish simplicity. Actually, though, the beauty of the imagery is quite beyond imitation. There

are many other examples of this in Zen writings. For example, Gutei Osho would always just stick up a finger whenever he was asked anything about Zen. This is truly wonderful, but the very simplicity of it might make many people conclude that it is childish foolishness. There is also Tokusan Zenji who would often respond with a blow whenever he was asked something about Zen. It might all seem a little silly but this was his way of bringing people to their senses. As the next line says, **sometimes it's a finger, sometimes a fist**. What are they doing this for? Needless to say, it is to deprive students of their delusions. What is left when we are deprived of all our delusions? The true fact itself with nothing sticking. This is the sharpest sword.

Leaning on heaven and shining on the snow. There have been similar lines in Zen writings. For example, there is "a single sword leans cold on heaven." These were the words of Kusunoki Masashige, the illustrious Japanese general, as he set out with his troops to the Minato River prepared to meet his own death. He had already gone to his final dokusan under his Zen master, Soshun Zenji. At that time Soshun Zenji said, "If both heads are cut off together, a single sword is cold leaning against the sky." The adjective "cold light" [*kankô*] was sometimes used when referring to a truly sharp sword blade. The line in today's verse about shining on the snow is a reference to that sharpest of blades, our essential nature. Many Japanese are familiar with the phrase: "Unsheathed, the blade sends forth icy jewels" [*nukeba tamachiru kôri no ha*]. The two heads spoken of by Soshun Zenji are the two aspects of subject and object or life and death. When that has been cut off, what remains is essential nature.

And when it comes to the blade which "leans against heaven shining on the snow," as the verse says, **a master blacksmith cannot beat it down, a great craftsman cannot finish polishing it**. The sword of essential nature is sharpened to perfection from the outset; it cannot be sharpened any further. It is polished to perfection; not even a master craftsman could improve upon it. Never did it contain a single blemish or speck of dirt.

There is something else. In other words, I have something else to say. **Each coral branch reflects the moon.** It is very rare for the verse to finish with a line from the case but most fitting here.

Today's koan is a difficult one. Please remember, though, that the main thing is to continue sitting. Sitting itself will produce endless benefits and virtue. At the same time, your circumstances will begin to improve on their own. Please trust me on this point.

I hope to be able to continue coming here to Jiganji Temple in Takatsuki [a city near Osaka] as long as I live. Even if I am not able to come, I plan to continue directing the San'un Zendo in Kamakura as long as I am alive. Let us all do our very best.