

CASE 4

**Tokusan Carrying
His Bundle**



By Yamada Kôun

Instruction:

The blue sky, the bright sun: there is no pointing out the east and marking the west. Time, season, karmic ties: give the medicine according to the disease. Just tell me, is it better to "let go," or to "hold fast"? I will give you an example, look!

Case:

Tokusan arrived at Isan. Carrying his bundle under his arm, he stepped into the preaching hall and walked across it from east to west and from west to east. Looking around he said, "Nothing, nothing!" Then he went out. Setchô comments, "I have seen through him."

But when he got to the monastery gate, Tokusan said, "Still, I should not be so hasty." So, he dressed formally and re-entered [the hall] to meet Isan. As Isan sat [at his place], Tokusan held up his sitting cloth and said, "Master!" Isan was about to take up his whisk, when Tokusan suddenly shouted, "Kaatz!" Then he flourished his sleeves and went out. (Setchô comments, "I have seen through him.")

Turning his back on the preaching hall, Tokusan put on his straw sandals, and left. In the evening Isan asked the head monk, "Where is the new-comer who arrived here a while ago?" The head monk answered, "At that time he turned his back on the preaching hall, put on his straw sandals, and went away." Isan said, "One day that fellow will go up to the top of a lonely peak, build a grass hut, and scold the buddhas and abuse the patriarchs." (Setchô comments, "Piling frost on top of snow.")

Verse:

Seeing through once, seeing through twice;
Piling frost on top of snow.
How dangerous it was!
The general of the Flying Cavalry entered the enemy camp;
How many could come back safe and sound?

One dashes by, but the other does not let him pass:

On a solitary mountaintop he sits in the weeds.

Hah!

On the Instruction:

The blue sky, the bright sun: there is no pointing out the east and marking the west.

What does this mean? It refers to the essential world: it is like the blue sky under the brightest sun. Therefore, you should not try to point out the east or west, for actually there are no such directions in the essential world. It is somewhat like a great empty space, but this comparison too is inadequate. Our essential world is far more wonderful and exceedingly more vast than so-called outer space. Therefore, there are no such distinctions as east and west, south and north, and consequently no going and coming back. It is a world which transcends all oppositions.

But when you see someone whose time is not yet ripened, that is, someone who has not grasped this world yet, you feel obliged to teach him or her to see it. So, **time, season, karmic ties: give the medicine according to the disease.** When sick people come to you, you must give each the necessary medicine. Almost all people are ill from birth. With what disease? The disease of a single thing appearing to be two things. Strangely enough, there is no one who can see one thing as one thing from birth. Everybody lives in the world of oneness, and yet it looks like two worlds. Alas, this is the disease! And yet, in reality, every single person possesses the world of oneness, for as it is said, "All living things possess the wisdom and virtue of the Tathagata." This is what is called "Buddha-nature." To those who are not yet aware of this fact, "medicine" is given, so that they may come to realization at the first opportunity.

There is a great variety of "diseases." Some souls are very seriously ill. But the disease gets less and less severe as you go up through the six realms: hell, hungry demons, beasts, fighting spirits, human beings, and heaven. If you have no sickness whatsoever, if you are completely whole, you are a buddha. Just below the level of the Buddha are bodhisattvas, like Bodhisattva Kanzeon (Avalokitesvara) or Bodhisattva Monju (Manjusri), as you know. These bodhisattvas still seem to have a trace of opacity – at least that is how they have been understood in the Buddhist tradition.

The Buddha is truly healthy and whole. And that is how we also can be. Why? Because our essence too is completely healthy and whole. We are simply dreaming delusive dreams. Mere dreams, they are not realities, and are destined to be dissipated in due course. Therefore, when a sick person comes, you cannot help giving him or her the necessary medicine.

There exist various sorts of medicine, but there are two main ones: "letting go" and "holding fast." "Letting go" means accepting everything; this is good, that is good too ("Yes and no are both good"). "Holding fast," on the other hand, means rejecting any answer given by students. Seen from the essential world, not one answer can be accepted; seen in a different

aspect, any answer will do. Why will any answer do? Because, in this case, every answer is backed up by the essential world.

Just tell me, is it better to "let go," or is it better to "hold fast"? I will give you an example, look! What kind of medicine should be given to this or that person? Should you "let the person go" or "hold him or her fast"? Here is a good example, so have a close look at it!

On the Case:

Tokusan arrived at Isan. Tokusan¹, who would become an expert in handling the stick, was originally a scholar, a learned monk who specialized in the Diamond Sutra. That sutra states that a person who has become a monk needs an infinitely long span of time and extremely severe practice before he or she comes to enlightenment and eventually becomes a buddha. "After you have renounced the world to be a monk," it reads, "you need a thousand kalpas to learn the Buddhist way of life and ten thousand kalpas to acquire the rules of Buddhist behavior. Yet that is not sufficient to become a buddha." Tokusan firmly believed it to be that difficult to become a buddha.

"But now in the south," he mused, "there seems to exist the so-called Zen sect, which preaches that a person can become a buddha immediately with a kensho [*sokushin-jôbutsu*]. What insolence! All right, I will go down there and eradicate all those devils myself." So he put his Diamond Sutra commentaries (said to have been written by a monk named Dôin at Seirûyji in the 8th century) in his luggage, and set out in high spirits. He came as far as the province of Rei, where he found, by the road, a little teahouse which offered some rice cakes. In Japan such cakes would probably be *daifuku*² or something like that, but in China they may have been fried cakes in a twisted form [*yujî*]. Seeing the cakes Tokusan felt hungry, so he went inside. To the old woman attending he said, "May I have a plate of these cakes?" The woman asked him, "Your Reverence, what is that heavy-looking bundle you are carrying?" He answered, "Oh, this? This is a bunch of commentaries on the Diamond Sutra. Haven't you ever heard of the 'Shû Diamond [*Kongô*]?" "Shû Diamond" (or "Shû Diamond King") actually refers to the Kongô gods whose statues are seen mostly at the main entrance of Buddhist temples. Now Tokusan's family name was "Shû"³, so he was nicknamed "Shû Diamond" because of his reputed knowledge about the Diamond Sutra. "Now, haven't you ever heard of the Shû Diamond? That's me, you know." – a powerful self-confidence as the greatest specialist on the Diamond Sutra under the sun. Then the old woman said, "Very well, your Reverence. You have your commentaries on the Diamond Sutra there, so I'd like to ask you a question about it. I have heard that the Diamond Sutra states, 'The past mind cannot be grasped, the present mind cannot be grasped, the future mind cannot be grasped.' You say you are going to eat our

¹ 780?-865.

² A Japanese "cake" made from sweet beans and special rice.

³ The same pronunciation but with a different character.

cakes, but are you going to eat them with your past mind, present mind, or future mind? If you can answer this, you can have your cakes without paying; if not, I won't even sell you any." What an astonishing old woman!

The past is already gone, and the future is not yet here, so neither can be grasped. We may think then that at least the present can be attained, but the moment we say "pre..." it is already gone. Only when you observe the present in a macroscopic way can you feel that the present exists. But when you look at it in a microscopic way, even the pronunciation of the first syllable of the word "present" is something in the past, since time can be endlessly divided into more and more minute periods. So Tokusan, the Shû Diamond, was suddenly stuck by the old woman's question. Mere intellectual understanding is so powerless. What a fearful old woman! he must have thought. We do not know whether the old woman sold him some cakes or gave them to him after all, as it is not recorded. At any rate, Tokusan concluded that there must be some great master around here, since even an old woman at a teahouse possessed such wisdom. He asked her about it, and she replied, "There is a Zen master called Ryûtan a few miles away, so go to him."

Thus Tokusan came to Ryûtan. The story right after the encounter of the two is related in Case 28 of the *Mumonkan* (Ryûtan's Name Has Echoed Long). It is a very dramatic, interesting one, in which Tokusan comes to enlightenment under Ryûtan. Tokusan kept on asking Ryûtan questions until late at night, when he finally felt ready to bid farewell to the master. Ryûtan handed him a paper lantern to light the way. At the moment Tokusan stretched out his hand to receive it, Ryûtan blew out the light. Complete darkness – and suddenly, Tokusan was enlightened. At that moment his time was ripe, it seems.

After this experience, Tokusan went on a journey to try his skill with other noted Zen personages. It was the custom for prominent Zen people of old to visit various Zen masters to deepen their own satori experience. And so Tokusan visited Isan. We have already met Master Isan Reiyû⁴ in Case 40 of the *Mumonkan* (Kicking Over the Water Jug), a man of outstanding speech and a noble master revered as one of the founders of the Igyô Sect. A distinguished Zen master, wielding a stick and shouting "Kaatz" were not his teaching style. Figuratively speaking, he was not so much the general who himself rode around on a horse and fought with his enemies as the dignified commander who sat in the recesses of the war camp and directed the battle a thousand miles away.

So, "Tokusan arrived at Isan." **Carrying his bundle under his arm:** "Bundle" means some items wrapped up in a cloth [*furoshiki*] and carried by practicing monks when they travel around. With this bundle under his arm, **he stepped into the preaching hall and walked across from east to west and from west to east.** He stepped onto the floor of the preaching hall without taking off his sandals, marched about, and **looking around he said, "Nothing, nothing!"** **Then he went out.** He surveyed the area, saying "Mu, Mu!" and departed.

⁴ 771-853.

Probably Master Isan was present. What insolence in front of a master! However, this action has two aspects: in one way, it mocks the master to his face, indicating, "I heard there was a great master called Isan, so I came here to meet him, but ha! there is nothing!"; in another way, Tokusan thus demonstrates his own understanding of nothingness by saying, "Mu, Mu!" and retiring thereupon.

Here Master Setchô inserted a comment. This does not mean that Setchô was present at the scene; rather, he was reading the case intending to make a verse for it, when he was enticed to comment: **I have seen through him.** I have seen through Tokusan's mind and heart. This is a key point of the koan. About this, Yasutani Roshi writes in his book of teisho: "It could mean, 'How great the man is!' or 'He is quite a man,' or even 'He is a fake.' You should look at it according to your own level of understanding." At any rate, it can be said, firstly, that the true figure of Tokusan – Tokusan in his total emptiness – has been "seen through." Secondly, the level of his practice – the depth of his Zen understanding – has been "seen through" too.

This "seeing through" takes place not as a conclusion after intellectual thinking and careful deliberation, but merely as an act of perceiving. It is like a mirror which reflects whatever comes before it. How terrifying it is to be "seen through"! They say that a real physiognomist has an instinctive understanding of the customer who has just come in. If he gets involved in physiognomic discussions and theories, he errors. True masters in any field seem to act in the same way.

But when he got to the monastery gate, Tokusan said, "Still, I should not be so hasty." Don't be in a hurry, he said to himself. "Master Isan is said to be a master of great virtue and knowledge, who has gathered 15,000 disciples. I should wait and inquire a little further!"

So, he dressed formally and re-entered the hall to meet Isan. This time he put on his formal robe and went to meet Isan officially.

As Isan sat at his place, Tokusan held up his sitting cloth. Tokusan put his sitting cloth on his right hand and presented it to Isan as the latter took his seat. And Tokusan **said, "Master!"**

Isan was about to take up his whisk. Isan reached for his *hossu* which lay in front of him. He might have thought that he must be ready to answer any question. However, the moment Isan reached for the whisk, **Tokusan suddenly shouted, "Kaatz!"** **Then he flourished his sleeves and went out.** Actually Tokusan is famous for handling his stick, but here he let out a "Kaatz!" "Flourishing his sleeves and going out" indicates that Tokusan wanted to have nothing more to do with the scene. And with this he was manifesting his own Zen understanding.

There Setchô interpolates another comment: **I have seen through him.** This is the second time Setchô "saw through him." But how do you think he saw through Tokusan? Tokusan surely had a wonderful level of understanding, but he seems to have had a deep-rooted

life-long tendency to dwell too much in his world of satori (if not adhere to it) [*kôjô-issshokuhen*], without being able to come freely out of it. Even if you have attained the wonderful world of satori, you cannot be of help to anyone as long as you remain within it. Even Shakyamuni stayed in this pure world of satori for about a week – the world which is described in the sentence, "I try to save living beings, but look, there are no living beings at all." It is a world without any opposition, a world of perfect oneness, so you can recognize no people to save. But if you cannot save other people, you have nothing to do with religion. For this reason, you must come back to the world of ordinary human beings once again. Tokusan, on his part, lingered too much in the world of satori -- something Isan will also point out later. Setchô, too, saw through him. He must have thought: Great as he is, Tokusan is still incomplete.

Turning his back on the preaching hall, Tokusan put on his straw sandals and left. Thus the dialogue between Isan and Tokusan ended. But Isan thought that this incident could be of some instruction for the disciples, **so in the evening Isan asked the head monk, "Where is the newcomer who arrived here a while ago?"** The head monk was the senior monk who sat at the first place among all the practicing monks. Isan asked him where the newly arrived monk was – even though he already knew everything.

Then **the head monk answered, "At that time he turned his back on the preaching hall, put on his straw sandals and went away."** To this, Isan commented, **"One day that fellow will go up to the top of a lonely peak, build a grass hut, and scold the buddhas and abuse the patriarchs."** Isan says that Tokusan would build a hut on top of a lonely mountain and spend all his life speaking ill of Shakyamuni Buddha and Bodhidharma. You must be familiar with the saying, "When a buddha comes, kill him; when a patriarch comes, kill him." This does not mean that you should murder them in a physical sense; it means you must get rid of seemingly holy ideas such as "buddha" and "patriarch." The phrase "to scold the buddhas and abuse the patriarchs" is akin to this saying. The preaching of Shakyamuni and the teachings of Bodhidharma are all useless when you look at them solely from the essential point of view. And that is how Tokusan will always look at things, Isan comments. This remark is like a large net of prophecy thrown over Tokusan, who, totally captured, will never be able to escape it. Great as Tokusan was, this Zen match seems to show that Isan's understanding was far superior.

Setchô comments, "Piling frost on top of snow." This saying is a metaphor for something unnecessary, superfluous. You talk about such a strange prophecy, but how useless! The essential value of Tokusan will never increase nor decrease, no matter what you say about it. What you did was simply piling frost on top of snow. – This may be one meaning of the comment. The other meaning relates to a statement in Case 28 of the *Mumonkan* (Ryûtan's Name Has Echoed Long), in which, as I mentioned before, Tokusan came to enlightenment under Master Ryûtan. "The following day Ryûtan ascended the rostrum and declared, "There is a man among you whose fangs are like trees of swords and whose mouth is like a bowl of blood. Strike him and he won't turn his head. Some day he will settle on top of an isolated peak and

establish my way there." That is, Ryûtan already said a similar thing before; it is not at all necessary to repeat it. – This could be another implication of Setchô's words. Furthermore, Yasutani Roshi says in his book of teisho, "'Piling frost on top of snow' literally indicates something redundant. But it implies praise, too. On the surface it abuses Isan, saying, 'Ryûtan already mentioned it before,' but in reality it extols him – 'How great he was!'" You might as well savor the saying in various ways.

On the Verse:

Seeing through once, seeing through twice. The first "seeing through" relates to Setchô's comment – "I have seen through him" – when Tokusan first came into the preaching hall and, after saying "Nothing, nothing!", left the hall. The second "seeing through" indicates Setchô's second comment when Tokusan came back to meet Isan in formal attire and then, shouting "Kaatz!" at Isan (who was about to pick up his whisk), flourished his sleeves and went out. This speedy action of going-out was now "seen through." "Seeing through" is free from any theories; it simply sees through Tokusan's true, intrinsic face, but, at the same time, it sees through his degree of understanding.

Piling frost on top of snow. As mentioned before, this is Setchô's comment on Isan's words which foretold that Tokusan would one day go to the top of a lonely mountain peak, build a grass hut there, and scold the buddhas and abuse the patriarchs. I would like you to savor well Isan's world, which engulfs that of Tokusan. Thus, with the first two lines of the Verse – "Seeing through once, seeing through twice; piling frost on top of snow" – we should fully appreciate both the world of Tokusan and that of Isan.

How dangerous it was! The situation was dangerous for Tokusan as well as for Isan. Both had a very narrow escape indeed. Tokusan could hurl a "Kaatz!" at Isan who was about to take up a whisk, but it was wise that he flourished his sleeves and made his prompt exit. What would have happened if Isan had actually picked up his whisk? Tokusan might have gotten beaten up, and thus a deadly hand-to-hand fight could have taken place. It was skillful of the two not to go that far, but to put an end to the scene immediately.

The general of the Flying Cavalry entered the enemy camp. This line is based upon a famous anecdote: During the reign of Emperor Kôbun of the Han Dynasty, there was a man named Rikô who excelled in archery and horseback-riding. So the emperor gave him the name "the general of the Flying Cavalry" and cherished him under his protection. One day Rikô chased the enemy so deep into their territory that he was eventually captured by them and dragged into their camp. He had been wounded, so they simply dumped him between two horses, where he lay motionless. When he opened his eyes, he saw nearby a horse with a child on its back – an outstanding horse! So he got up slowly, chased the child away, jumped onto the horse, and off he dashed! The enemies ran after him, but he shot them down on horseback and successfully returned home.

How many could come back safe and sound? How many could come back all right like Rikô, the general of the Flying Cavalry? At least, that was the case with Tokusan, who went deep into the camp of Isan and yet came back safely.

One, namely Tokusan, **dashes by, but the other**, namely Isan, **does not let him pass.** Isan spread his net of prophecy and captured Tokusan, saying, "That fellow will one day go to a lonely peak, build a grass hut, and scold the buddhas and abuse the patriarchs; **on a solitary mountaintop he sits in the weeds.**"

As a conclusion Setchô says, **Hah!** [*totsu!*], which reveals the depth of his own Zen understanding. This word clears out everything. Many things have been said, but their content is totally void. Setchô here is like a school teacher who writes many words and draws pictures on the blackboard to teach the pupils, but when the class is out, he erases them all, murmuring "totsu!" and goes away. Now I also say – "Totsu!"