

CASE 13

Haryô's Silver Bowl



By Yamada Kôun

Instruction: ¹

A cloud sits over the great plain, snow covers the reed blossoms; they can hardly be distinguished from each other. As for coldness, it is colder than ice and snow; as for fineness, it is finer than rice powder. The deepest depth cannot be penetrated even by a buddha's eyes, the densest area cannot be measured even by aggressive demons. Let us put aside for a moment those who understand three when one is raised; what should be spoken in order to cut off the tongues of all people under heaven? Just say, who had the capacity to achieve this? I'll show you an example, look!

Case:

A monk asked Haryô, "What is the Deva Sect?" Haryô said, "Heaping up snow in a silver bowl."

Verse:

Old Shinkai is truly superb,
How wonderful he could utter,
"Heaping up snow in a silver bowl!"
Ninety-six schools must realize it by themselves.
If you don't understand it yet, ask the moon high in heaven.
Oh Deva Sect, Deva Sect!
Beneath the red flag a pure wind is blowing.

On the Instruction:

A cloud stays over the great plain. The great plain is completely covered with a cloud. You might think this is a description of some scenic view, but the word "cloud" doesn't refer to a cloud in the sky. This "cloud" is a transparent one, with no color at all. Some people, like Mr.

Ino'ue Shûten, a Buddhist scholar who does very careful research, read the Chinese character for "stay over" [*koru*] differently and interpret it as "gather" [*atumaru*]. However, both readings come down to the same meaning, so there is little sense discussing this question further. The "great plain" stands for the entire universe. So, "a cloud stays over the great plain" means that the whole universe is completely covered with a colorless, transparent "cloud." This "cloud" is interchangeable with "vacuum," too. A "cloud" of vacuum is spread over the entire universe. This depicts nothing other than our essential world. Yasutani Haku'un Roshi used to say, "In the universe there is only this one cloud. 'Buddha,' 'Wondrous dharma,' 'Mu,' 'One Hand' and so forth are all different names given to this cloud." Also, "mind," "Buddhist dharma," "dharma-nature," "true fact" – all these terms are different epithets given to this "cloud." It's the world where "there isn't a speck of cloud that obstructs the eyes."

One saying puts it, "The entire world remains disclosed." Nothing is hidden. Mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers. Willows are green, flowers red; pillars are vertical, thresholds horizontal; they are all as distinct and manifest as they've ever been. All beings in the phenomenal world are displayed in front of your eyes as they really are. Seen from one perspective there isn't even one thing. But seen from another perspective everything is there as it actually is. It is "wondrous being," as they say. The doctrine of Five Degrees by Master Tôzan names the phase of ultimate and complete nothingness "the main aspect" [*shô*], whereas the world of phenomena right in front of your eyes is called "side aspect" [*hen*]; and yet, the "main aspect" and the "side aspect" are, in actuality, one and the same, or rather, they are two facets of the same reality.

In the *Hannya-shingyô Sutra* the main aspect is expressed as "emptiness" [*kû*], the side aspect as "form" [*shiki*]. The sutra proclaims the identity of the two with the character *soku* ["is (equal to)," "is nothing but"]. However, I'm rather unhappy to see the character *soku* because it could give you an idea that "emptiness" and "form" are thus artificially combined. I would rather omit the character *soku* and say it this way: This² is "form-emptiness" or "emptiness-form." Pillars, thresholds – they are all "emptiness-form" or "form-emptiness."

Snow covers the reed blossoms; they can hardly be distinguished from each other.

White snow falls on the reed blossoms, which are supposed to be white as well – therefore, white upon white. Both are the same color. If you observe well, however, you'll see that snow is snow and blossoms are blossoms. Despite the same white color, you may discern a difference in substance. But if you don't look attentively, it is quite difficult to see the difference clearly.

I often use the diagram of a fraction. The denominator is infinite and at the same time zero; this is expressed in our text as "A cloud covers the great plain." The numerator represents the phenomenal world, which is described above as "the entire world remains disclosed." There is a bar between the denominator and the numerator, so it may seem they are two distinct entities. But in actual fact this bar does not exist. Behind the "numerator" –

² Showing his kotsu.

each and every thing in the phenomenal world – lies always the world of zero-emptiness, the "denominator." By putting the numerator above the denominator I'm in a way putting something infinite above infinity itself. If I get rid of the bar, the two separate aspects are no more discernable.

"Snow covers the red blossoms; hardly can they be distinguished from each other" –this sentence can be appreciated according to the line of thought mentioned above. The world of essence and that of phenomena appear to be two different worlds. Yet if you look closely at the phenomenal world, there exists nothing at all; seen from behind nothing is there. Sheer nothing-ness rests upon nothing-ness. If you look at them this way, you can't tell the difference any more.

Why is that expressed this way in the Instruction? Because the above sentence anticipates the main Case with the phrase "Heaping snow in a silver bowl," while demonstrating our essential self or the true fact (the term "essential self" may sound subjective, while "true fact" objective; they are, however, one and the same). This applies also to the following sentences in the Instruction.

As for coldness, it is colder than ice and snow; as for fineness, it is finer than rice powder. If you talk about its "coldness," it's colder than ice and snow. What's this "it"? It's our essential nature. It has no temperature. Only when the ego appears in it, then it gets hot, with blood running up to the head. But the ego is a phenomenon, and our true, essential nature underlying that ego knows no temperature. So it's colder than ice and snow. Or when you talk about its "fineness," it's finer than rice powder. People in old times seem to have considered rice powder to be the finest of all things. But "it" is finer than rice powder. No wonder it's so fine, because it has no form. Here, too, we are talking about our essential nature.

A saying goes, "As for greatness, it transcends all places, as for tightness, there is no chink anywhere." Having "no chink" indicates the highest degree of "tightness." This deals with our essential world, where there is no "chink" whatsoever.

Still another saying goes, "With a tight fit, never to let the wind pass through"³. It's absolutely true that our essential world is so "tight" that it allows no "opening." We see, we hear –there's no "chink" in it. Open our eyes and we can see the sky. With our ears we can hear anything. Our mind is void of any chink or crack. Maybe someone says, "How about when we are asleep?" It's the same, since there's only the sleeping. No "crack" in that fact. If you hit the sleeper, he or she will immediately wake up.

The deepest depth cannot be penetrated even by a buddha's eyes. The eyes of a buddha – like Shakyamuni Buddha or Amida Buddha – should be able to see through even the most minute things, things which are almost invisible. But as far as our essential nature is concerned, no matter how hard a buddha may try to see it, his eyes can't catch anything. This is quite natural. Since there is no form in the essential world, how can anything ever be

³ Verse of Case 26 of the *Mumonkan*

visible? Neither can it **be measured even by aggressive demons**. "Demons" are supposed to be very clever. But even with their cunning intrigues they can't fathom the depth of the essential world, they can't detect any "crack" in this world. No wonder, because there is no bottom, neither is there any opening at all in our essential world. It is so, it can't be otherwise.

Let us put aside for a moment those who understand three when one is raised. The expression "those who understand three when one is raised" refers to very wise people who – as a common Japanese idiom goes – can "understand ten when they hear one." It's like a very smart person who can "see through" all four corners of a square box when someone explains about just one of them. Now "let us put aside" those wise people, because they will understand the point without someone explaining it. But other people should attentively listen to what is now being said.

What should be spoken in order to cut off the tongues of all people under heaven? To "cut off the tongues of all people under heaven" literally means to make all people on the earth utterly speechless. It refers to "one phrase" which practically stuns everyone. Even when they want to say something about it, they are completely deprived of speech. Who on earth could have uttered such a phrase?

Just say, who had the capacity to achieve this? Could anyone ever utter a phrase which no one on earth is capable of criticizing or arguing about? Oh yes! One example is our Haryô. **So, I'll show you an example, look!**

On the Case:

A monk asked Haryô, "What is the Deva Sect?" Haryô said, "Heaping up snow in a silver bowl." A wonderful example of such a "phrase" comes from Monk Haryô, a disciple of Master Unmon. His exact name was Master Kôkan, "Haryô" being the name of the place where he used to live.

Soon after our kensho we have to face the koan "Haryô's Three Barriers" in the *Miscellaneous Koans*. Our present koan is among these three "barriers." – The first "barrier" goes⁴:

What is the way? – A clearly enlightened monk falls into a well.

The second one is:

What is the sharpest sword? – Each branch of the coral reflects the moon.

The last one is the present koan:

What is the Deva Sect? – Heaping up snow in a silver bowl.

Master Kôkan was, as mentioned before, a dharma successor of Master Unmon. When you succeed to the dharma of some master, it's an established custom to receive a piece of calligraphy called "a certificate of dharma succession." With this the master certifies that such

⁴ The order of the three "barriers" in our *Miscellaneous Koans* is slightly different.

and such person is a dharma heir of his or hers. But Master Kôkan refused to accept such a certificate; instead he gave Master Unmon these three koans, which the master, on his part, greatly appreciated. He said to Master Kôkan, "When I die, you don't have to have a funeral for me. Instead, make a teisho in front of my spirit on these three koans" – which shows how much Master Unmon cherished the three koans. Our present Case, one of the three "barriers," starts with the question, "What is the Deva Sect?" "Deva" isn't a personal name; in India there were many people who had the word "Deva" in their names – one calculation claims there were eight million of them. The most famous one in Buddhism is Devadatta, a cousin of Shakyamuni Buddha's, who renounced the world and became a monk. But he was so jealous of Shakyamuni Buddha that he tried to kill him and eventually fell into hell. The story goes like this: One day he knew that Shakyamuni would pass by the foot of a high mountain, so he rolled a big stone from the top against Shakyamuni. But a person of extremely high virtue rarely falls victim to such disastrous plots. In this case too Shakyamuni hurt only his little finger, which bled a bit. Of course, to make the Buddha's body bleed is one of the greatest sins, so Devadatta was cast into hell. It was because of this story that Devadatta became very famous.

But the "Deva" in our present text refers not to Devadatta, but to the Reverend Kanadaiba⁵, the fifteenth Patriarch after Shakyamuni and the dharma heir of the famous fourteenth Patriarch Ryûju [Chin.: *Wagarjuna*]⁶. Kanadaiba's father was very rich, being engaged in the "wealth business" – probably something like banking of today. Kanadaiba also worked in this field when he was young. He was a very smart person, extremely strong in argument. No one could match him in logical debate. But when he met Bodhisattva Ryûju, he was truly persuaded and became his disciple. Up to then he had been a sort of philosopher, not a Buddhist. Later he himself became the fifteenth Patriarch.

At that time there were various philosophical schools in India – someone maintains they were 96 in all (see our Verse below). Kanadaiba debated with them all and was always victorious. In those days the winner of a debate used to raise a red flag to demonstrate victory, and the loser had to cower under that flag. In extreme cases the loser chopped off his arm, or cut off his own head and died. If you read the questions and answers of these debates, they are quite interesting. There are always clever counter-arguments against any tricky questions. Participants were all extremely sharp orators. Once a philosopher debated with the Reverend Kanadaiba and lost the argument. When he, utterly ashamed of himself, was about to cut his own throat, the Reverend Kanadaiba stopped him and shaved his head instead of letting him cut his throat. Thus he made the philosopher one of his disciples.

In those days there was no "Zen Sect" in India. The school headed by Kanadaiba, successor to Shakyamuni's dharma, became highly respected and was widely known as the "Deva Sect." Shaku-sôen Roshi, former abbot of Engakuji Tempel in Kamakura, wrote in one of his books that the name "Zen Sect" had five preceding names. First it was the "Sect of the Eye

⁵ "Daiba" is the Chinese transcription of "Deva."

⁶ The whole story is related in the *Denkôroku* (Transmission of Light).

Treasury of Truth and Dharma" [*Shôbôgenzô-shû*]. This came from Shakyamuni Buddha's statement, "I have the eye treasury of truth and dharma. Now I entrust Mahakashyapa with this"⁷. Master Dôgen wrote a series of treatises under the title *Eye Treasury of Truth and Dharma*: he was writing on nothing but the Zen Sect itself. The next name given to the movement was, as already mentioned, the "Deva Sect" on account of the fifteenth Patriarch Daibadatta. The core of the movement was the same. Then came the name "Bodhidharma Sect," deriving from Bodhidharma, the 28th Patriarch. Then the "Sôkei Sect." "Sôkei" means Master Enô, the sixth Patriarch in China (starting with Bodhidharma) or 34th Patriarch of the entire line (starting with Mahakashyapa). Master Enô was called "Sôkei" because he lived on a mountain named Sôkei. Therefore, the "Sôkei Sect" means nothing but the Zen Sect. Next comes – according to Shaku-sôen Roshi – the Rinzai Sect. I believe the Soto Sect has the same right to be designated as a fifth name given to the Zen Sect, but the roshi doesn't mention "Soto Sect" anywhere. Anyway, the name of the Zen Sect changed five times in history. Therefore, the "Deva Sect" in our present context represents the "Sect of the Buddha's Heart," namely the Zen Sect. So the question, "What is the Deva Sect?" means the same thing as "What is Zen?" Another way of putting the same question would be, "What is your intrinsic face?" Or – in a Zen-like manner – "What is the meaning of the Patriarch's coming from the west?" Or "What is the essential nature?" The question concerns, as I understand it, nothing but the essential world itself.

As a matter of fact, there is a lot of discussion among commentators concerning this question. But these discussions would only confuse us. This is somewhat natural because the Deva Sect was noted for its logical arguments. On the whole, Zen makes it a principle not to talk too much. The motto goes, "a transmission outside doctrine, without relying on words" [*kyôge betsuden, furyû monji*]. The truth lies not in talking. But the Reverend Kanadaiba was a skilled debater. That's why Great Master Ba (Master Baso Dôitsu) said, "If you talk a bit, you belong to the Deva Sect." If you are a Zen monk and have some words to say, you are an adherent of the Deva Sect. What the Great Master stressed is, "You should simply make *it* your pivotal point." However, since the Deva Sect also represents Zen, it must have this "it." What's this "it"? To those who know the matter well it should be clear enough: "It" refers to our essential nature. The pivotal point of Zen must be the experience of clearly realizing this fact; in other words, self-realization must be the central core of Zen. That's what Great Master Ba meant with his sentence, "You should simply make *it* your pivotal point." Master Dôgen also explains the phrase "without relying on words" as follows: "'Without relying on words' demonstrates how all words actually are." All words transcend words. If you look at the matter from the viewpoint of the essential world, it becomes that way, not that it "appears" that way. Or rather, it *is* that way, not that it "becomes" that way.

"What is the Deva Sect?" To this question: "Heaping up snow in a silver bowl." It's

⁷ Cf. Case 6 of the *Mumonkan*.

reputed to be a wonderful answer. Snow and a silver bowl are both white. In this point they are identical. But one is snow and the other silver, therefore they are different. Though they are different, they look similar. It's exactly like the phrase in the Instruction: "Snow covers the reed blossoms, and they can hardly be distinguished from each other." The phenomenal world and the essential world are two things. But in reality the phenomenal world is tightly accompanied by the essential world right behind it. The denominator of a fraction always underlies its numerator; the numerator and the denominator are always a couple. Every phenomenon has the world of zero-infinite necessarily behind it. "Heaping up snow in a silver bowl." The "main aspect" [*shō*] sustains the "side aspect" [*hen*], the phenomenal world rests upon the essential world – if you put the matter precisely. What you can see is always something phenomenal, which is the only aspect ordinary people ever know of. But in reality the world of zero-infinite is spread right beneath the phenomena. This koan clearly demonstrates this point.

"What is the essential nature?" The answer is, "Heaping up snow in a silver bowl." As you know, when you handle this koan as part of "Haryō's three turning words" in the *Miscellaneous Koans* soon after kensho, you're supposed to try and find something that's similar and yet different, something that's different and yet similar. But we have to go much deeper than that. To try and find something similar, etc. belongs to logical thinking. In actual fact there is no logic at all. Only: "Heaping up snow in a silver bowl." Only this voice. The voice that pronounces "Heaping up snow in a silver bowl" belongs to the phenomenal realm. But the phenomenal voice of "Heaping up snow in a silver bowl" is heaping up snow in a silver bowl. Do you understand? The reality of the phrase "Heaping up snow in a silver bowl" is demonstrated as "Hea-ping-up-snow-ina-sil-ver- bowl!" That's how we ought to look at the phrase. In other words, the fact of "heaping up snow in a silver bowl" is manifested with the very phrase itself. I'd like to interpret the phrase this way.

As you may know, there is a famous Zen work called *Hōkyōzammai*, which we often recite during our sesshin along with the *Sandōkai*. It was composed by Master Tōzan Ryōkai, who was a founder of the Soto Sect and lived about a hundred years before Master Haryō Kōkan. In his *Hōkyōzammai* Master Tōzan already wrote, "Heaping up snow upon a silver bowl, hiding an egret in the clear moonlight." He went on to say, "They are similar, but not identical. Blended with each other as they are, their respective places are well known, etc." So Master Haryō borrowed that phrase in his answer. The only minor difference is in the wording: In the *Hōkyōzammai*, it's not "in a silver bowl" [*ginnan-ri ni*] but "upon a silver bowl" [*ginnan ni*]. Yet it's evident that Master Haryō took the phrase from there.

I'll stop my explanation here, though there are more points to observe in this koan. But if we keep discussing this and that, we may never come to an end.

On the Verse:

Old Shinkai is truly superb. "Shinkai" means Master Haryô Kôkan himself, since he resided in a temple called Shinkai-in. It's the same thing as Master Jôshû, whose name came from the "castle" [city] Jôshû where he lived. The word "old" is an expression of reverence. "Truly superb" – far from being common-place, the man is truly extraordinary.

How wonderful that he could say, "Heaping up snow in a silver bowl!" What a great phrase! It certainly is proof of his excellence.

Ninety-six schools must realize it by themselves. "Ninety-six schools" means the number of philosophical schools that existed in India at the time of the Reverend Kanadaiba. All of them ought to realize it by themselves. Asking someone about it will never bring you to any real understanding. No matter how great a philosopher you may be, you've got no other way than to realize it and experience it for yourself. No learning, no logical understanding is of any help here. Realize it by yourself, otherwise you won't amount to anything.

If you don't understand it yet, ask the moon high in heaven. How interesting! Can you appreciate this verse? Even if you address the moon and ask it a question, it won't give you any reply in words. Just look at the moon... what a beautiful moon... Oh, how true, this is "heaping up snow in a silver bowl," isn't it? If you don't understand it, you ask the moon. It doesn't have to be the moon, you know. It can be a flower or anything.

Oh Deva Sect, Deva Sect! The repetition is a sign of admiration. One commentator says that this "Deva Sect, Deva Sect!" is the same as the evocation "Namu Amida Buddha"⁸. There might be some truth in that.

Beneath the red flag a pure wind is blowing. The "red flag" refers to the flag the Reverend Kanadaiba raised many times as a sign of his victory in debate. Beneath that red flag an extremely pure and cool breeze is blowing – a beautiful expression to praise the excellent world of the Reverend Kanadaiba.

⁸ In Japanese: *Namu-amidabutsu*; *namu* = "I devote myself completely to."