

CASE 32

**Jô and "the Great
Meaning of Buddhism"**



By Yamada Kôun

Instruction:

Cut off the ten directions by sitting, and a thousand eyes open all of a sudden. Let one word cut through the stream, and the ten thousand activities are thoroughly scraped out. Is there anyone who dies and comes to life in the same way? What appears is the essence itself: If you are not able to grasp this at one stroke, I will present a koan of an ancient, look!

Case:

A senior monk Jô asked Rinzai, "What is the great meaning of Buddhism?" Rinzai came down from his seat, grabbed him by the lapels, slapped him and thrust him away. Jô stood there as if rooted to the spot. A monk standing nearby said, "Senior monk Jô, why don't you make a deep bow?" As he made a deep bow, Jô suddenly attained a great enlightenment.

Verse:

**He inherited all of Dansai's golden activity;
Then how could he just stay peaceful?
The mountain deity of Korei raised his hand, and lo, without effort,
Great Mount Ka with its ten thousand ridges was split in two.**

Today I'd like you to get a taste of the brisk and energetic style of Master Rinzai. As you all know, in present Japan only the Soto and Rinzai Sects are extant. The Ôbaku Sect also survives but has been subsumed into the Rinzai tradition. Compared to the Rinzai Sect, the Ôbaku Sect contains mixed elements, that is, some doctrinal components are mingled in it. At present, it seems that it's the Rinzai Sect that still retains some purity in practicing Zen. Both Harada Sogaku Roshi and Yasutani Haku'un Roshi have compared the state of the Soto Sect to eight o'clock in the evening – that is, almost completely dark – ; whereas the Rinzai Sect, the two roshis maintain, is about four or five o'clock in the late afternoon: its noonday brightness is passed, but some amount of light still remains. This refers to the purity of the satori experience. It's almost completely lost in the Soto Sect, hence the full darkness. In the Rinzai Sect, on the other hand, it's gradually getting darker, yet some light is still there, like

that at four or five o'clock in the late afternoon. This is mainly due to the brisk Rinzai style of training. Not indulging in verbal explanations of this or that, Great Master Rinzai cuts off delusive thoughts with a single stroke of the sword. This is the peculiar quality of Rinzai, and it has not, I think, been totally lost in the present Rinzai Sect.

In the earlier Soto Sect there were many illustrious Zen masters, but, coming closer to recent times, true Zen experience has tended to be lost and replaced by discursive dharma or conceptual and philosophical Zen. Harada Roshi claims that it's the so-called "Genzô scholars" that are mainly responsible for this degeneration, namely those people who study the *Shôbôgenzô* from a scholarly point of view. However, if we try to trace the problem to its origins we can say that, although the Genzô scholars certainly bear some responsibility, it is the general ways of reading the *Shôbôgenzô* that have long been mistaken – including, of course, its interpretation by Genzô scholars. There seems to be something in Master Dôgen's writing itself, namely the *Shôbôgenzô*, that lends itself to such mistaken ways of reading. If you read it with due attention, such mistakes will not occur, but still, I get the impression that there is something that invites such erroneous interpretations.

Master Dôgen was gifted with a sharp and speculative intelligence. This is quite a rare quality among the Japanese who are usually not talented in such intellectual conceptualization. The people most noted for this ability, I think, are the Germans, which is why there are many first-class philosophers from Germany. But among Japanese this kind of ability is fairly uncommon, so we can say that Master Dôgen was among the very rare ones in this country. Although he died at the early age of fifty-four, he was nonetheless able to leave us such a gigantic work.

On the other hand, from the Rinzai point of view, people probably can't stop asking what use there is to all this unnecessary verbalization! My first Zen master, Kôno Sôkan Roshi, once said, "The *Shôbôgenzô* is an uninteresting work." I must say that this certainly was a bold statement, and the Soto people might get furious at hearing it. Looking back, I think that Kôno Roshi hadn't really gone through the book. Nevertheless, the work contains something that might instigate such thinking among those who have undergone the pure Rinzai style of actual practice.

Until the beginning of the Meiji Period¹ the dharma lamp of the Soto Sect was still shining bright, but since the days of Zen Master Nishiari Bokusan it has become somewhat suspicious. Coming down to Kishizawa Ian Roshi, we can see that the *Shôbôgenzô* specialists, namely Genzô researchers, started to prevail. And their style of investigation seems to have been centered at Komazawa University, where there was a group of noted Genzô scholars. Among the famous names are Kurebayashi Kôdô and Nukariya Kaiten, who have built an impenetrable fortress of scholarship.

In his talks, Haku'un Roshi would refer every now and then to these Genzô specialists and criticize them severely. Some time ago I myself had a couple of occasions to write about Mr. Kurebayashi. It's interesting to note that Master Kimura Seiman² of Ryûhōji in Hokkaido also criticized Mr. Kurebayashi's view of Zen. One point noted by the abbot of

¹ 1867-1912.

² A disciple of Yasutani Haku'un Roshi and a dharma brother to Yamada Kôun Roshi.

Ryûhōji is that the reason for the misunderstanding of Zen by these scholars lies in the fact that they are entirely ignorant about the basics, chiefly dokusan practice. Sure enough, those scholars have never had the experience of dokusan. Yet it is clear that without dokusan, there is no real understanding of Zen. This doesn't mean that where there is dokusan there is always true Zen; but what I can clearly say is that where there is no dokusan there is no true Zen. There might be scholarship and learning, but no Zen.

As I mentioned earlier³, the Rinzai style is said to be like that of a dashing military general on horseback, hence the term "Rinzai the general," while the Soto way of training is characterized by the term "Soto the farmer," after one who nurtures the plants tenderly and lovingly, pulling out weeds one by one. The Rinzai style of training is certainly noteworthy and illustrious, but it tends to be rather rough. Its sharp, cutting edge is superb, but it tends to leave the tiny leafy particles uncut. If the minute, detailed post-satori training is neglected, your enlightenment tends to become only one-dimensional and you run the risk of becoming a "one-sided fellow"⁴. On the other hand, the Soto style of training is meticulous about details and tends to neglect the decisive blow necessary to cut off the main current of delusions. Which is more important? They are equally important, of course. However, Zen must first of all be able to cut the root of the whole matter. As Great Master Yōka said in his *Shōdōka*, "To cut off the root-source directly is the characteristic of the Buddha's way; I cannot pick up the leaves and search for the branches." Just like this statement you should first of all cut off the origin-source; after that, you might as well "pick up the leaves and search for branches," as the particular manner of the Soto Sect dictates. In today's teisho, we can observe the characteristics of the Rinzai style.

On the Instruction:

Cut off the ten directions by sitting, and a thousand eyes open all of a sudden. To "cut off the ten directions by sitting" means to squash the entire universe flat under the cushion and annihilate it through sitting. This means to exhaust and kill off entirely all delusive thoughts. For that, there is no other way than zazen. This particular moment is called the "great death." In order to "cut off the ten directions through sitting" the practice of Mu is the best way. "Muuuu!" – thus do you cut off the ten directions and all delusive thoughts. Then "a thousand eyes open all of a sudden" – the enlightened eye opens. Not that the number of eyes becomes a thousand; rather this number simply corresponds rhetorically with the number of the "ten directions," as Haku'un Rōshi comments. When you open the eyes of enlightenment you are able to see the Three Thousand Worlds⁵ with one single eye. According to the usual expression, exhausting the ten directions by sitting leads to "the great death and great resurrection" [*daishi-ichiban, daikatsu-genjō*].

This applies first of all to Zen masters, and here particularly to Great Master Rinzai. He himself exhausted all delusive thoughts by sitting and, by so doing, opened up "a thousand eyes all of a sudden." At the same time, the phrase depicts how such a master helps others

³ Cf. Case 14 above.

⁴ *Tanbankan*, literally: "a board-carrying fellow."

⁵ I.e., the entire universe.

achieve the same thing. A real master of Zen should be able to lead his or her disciples to "cut off the ten directions by sitting" and thereby "open their thousand eyes all of a sudden."

Let one word cut through the stream, and the ten thousand activities are thoroughly scraped out. This means basically the same thing as above. "One word" could also be one hand gesture or one movement of the foot. Master Gutei raised one finger – this is also "one word." "The stream" here means the delusive thoughts that come one after another inside your head. As you practice zazen, the "stream" of various thoughts flows endlessly. This current of consciousness doesn't stop. Yet with one word or one phrase or one movement of the foot – zap! – all this is cut off. Then the "ten thousand activities are thoroughly scraped out." "Ten thousand activities" are *all* activities – all distinctions, thoughts, movements of the mind. They are completely eliminated. To "be scraped out" [*shinsaku*] literally means to "be put to sleep [*shin*] and scraped off [*saku*]." In other words, you sweep them all away and annihilate them. With one word, all delusions are cut off, all delusive thoughts are made to stop and brought to naught.

This applies to the experience the Zen master himself or herself must have gone through, but at the same time it refers to the fact that the master causes this to happen with his or her students. In view of the following Case, the phrase – "Let one word cut through the stream, and the ten thousand activities are thoroughly scraped out" – applies to Rinzai as well as to the senior monk Jô.

Is there anyone who dies and comes to life in the same way? To "die in the same way" and to "come to life in the same way" means to go through the same process of the "great death" and the "great resurrection," as described above. Is there anyone who has had the same quality of experience?

What appears is the essence itself: If you are not able to grasp this at one stroke, I will present a koan of an ancient, look! "What appears" is a phenomenon. Every phenomenon, however, is the essence itself, is a full manifestation of the essential world. So this sentence – "What appears is the essence itself" [*kenjô kôan*] – is the same as *genjô kôan*, one of the famous topics in Master Dôgen's *Shôbôgenzô*. A mere gesture of your hand, one movement of your leg, or one phrase, one word – every one of these is the perfect presentation of the essential world. To "grasp" literally means to "put everything into a sack" [*dajô*], as Haku'un Rôshi explains. It means to take it in at a single gulp. If you are unable to swallow at once the very fact of "What appears is the essence itself" and to respond spontaneously "Oh, I see!", I'll have to present an example from the numerous koans featuring ancient Zen personages. Here's such an example, so look well!

On the Case:

A senior monk Jô asked Rinzai, "What is the great meaning of Buddhism?" A "senior monk" [*jôza*]⁶ is an honorific denoting Zen practitioners; therefore, every monk in the Zen hall was called "senior monk." Here appears a "senior monk Jô," who is said to have become a great master later on, although the details of his biography aren't clear. Anyway, he

⁶ Literally: "higher seat."

was one of Rinzai's disciples. At that time, however, he was not yet equipped with an enlightened eye.

The senior monk Jô asked Rinzai, "What is the great meaning of Buddhism?" The original word for "great meaning" is *taii*, which is usually understood as "epitome" or "summing up." But that's not the case here. Rather, it means "the ultimate reality" or "the fundamental fact" of the Buddhist dharma. In Zen writings, we often see such words as "meaning" or "sense" or "logic," implying some association with the so-called "truth." But to take our "great meaning" this way is to invite complication, so we prefer to use the word "fact." The "great meaning of Buddhism" is the fundamental *fact* of Buddhist dharma. We could also say "truth," but this gives the impression of something abstract and logical, which is not entirely appropriate. So let's avoid employing words related to logic and say the "fundamental fact, the ultimate." The monk Jô asked, "What is the ultimate fact of Buddhism?" There may be many aspects to the Buddhist dharma, but, in the end, what *is* Buddhism? This is precisely what everyone wants to know.

Rinzai came down from his seat, grabbed him by the lapels, slapped him and thrust him away. This is typical of Rinzai. He came down from his zazen seat, which was on a slightly elevated platform and meant especially for the master; he suddenly grabbed Jô by the neck of his robe like this⁷, and slapped him sprightly on the cheek – wham! – and pushed him away. What a rough treatment!

Jô stood there as if rooted to the spot. Jô just stood there, at a complete loss what to do. This is a nice state of mind. All of his delusive thoughts have disappeared. Ordinarily, a person in such a situation would grow angry, "Is that what an honorable master should do to a student?" Why, there might even be a brawl! But in Jô's case, he simply stood there stupefied. This is the moment of the great death, with all delusive thoughts totally exhausted. But, if you stop here, nothing would happen. Only a bothersome period would follow.

As I have said on many occasions, the way of Zen begins with the level of common sense and then, as you continue in the practice of Mu – "Muuu, Muuu, Muuu ...!" – you go deeper and deeper just like this stick rising gradually from a horizontal position and becoming vertical. That is the point of the "great death." In general, people think this is satori, but they are mistaken. Senior monk Jô is now precisely at this point – his mind being empty, his intellectual functions have come to an acute halt. "Ten thousand activities are thoroughly scraped out." At this particular point one more movement is needed, like this⁸, in order to come over here. To be fixed in this vertical position is a fatal error; you need another leap forward. Then all things open up – it's the "great resurrection."

In Jô's case, it so happened that **a monk standing nearby** watched him and **said, "Senior monk Jô, why don't you make a deep bow?"** I'm not sure whether this monk had an enlightened eye or not, but having witnessed this exhibition of Master Rinzai's special way of guidance, he couldn't help saying to Jô, "Hey, you, why don't you make a deep bow? Bow your thanks now!" The monk might have thought that if he had left Jô alone any longer, Jô might receive even more blows from the master. He told Jô to bow quickly.

⁷ Demonstrating vigorously.

⁸ Moving his stick slightly from its vertical position.

Hearing this, Jô started to bow and, at this very instant, all things collapsed. It was the "great resurrection." **As he made a deep bow, Jô suddenly attained a great enlightenment.** This *sudden* realization is important. Also, Rinzai's way of Zen guidance is distinguished by this abrupt awaking of the eye. The expression *kachi-ichige*⁹ refers to the same thing. It is because *kachi-ichige* is gone that real Zen has also disappeared.

This last "one stroke" can be occasioned by many things. In our present Case, it was the phrase, "Why don't you bow in thanksgiving?" This was "the one word that cuts though the current," by which all delusive thoughts are chopped off. Another example is Great Master Unmon who cried "OUCH!!" in great pain when he broke his leg, thereby attaining great enlightenment. Another story may be a slightly improper one: Once a person went to the toilet, and at the bottom of the toilet-hole there happened to be a big toad. When his dump hit the head of the toad, it cried out "Gmmmm!" – upon hearing that sound he came to a great realization

On the Verse:

He inherited all of Dansai's golden activity. "Dansai" is the Zen master name given to Ôbaku Zenji by the Tang Emperor Sensô. I'll omit the details and relate just a short summary of the story:

When Zen Master Ôbaku was still a young man, the crown prince Daichû at that time, later to become Emperor Sensô, went on a journey in disguise in order to escape the political troubles around him. Finding a temple, he practiced there secretly. Coincidentally, Ôbaku was practicing in the same temple. One day, on account of some questions pertaining to the dharma, the crown prince was given a blow by Ôbaku three times. When he later became emperor, he remembered the monk Ôbaku and wanted to give him a Zen title meaning "Ruffian Monk" [*sogyô no shamon*]. However, Prime Minister Hai-Shôkoku prevented him, saying, "That monk is a great person. He simply cut out Your Imperial Majesty's delusions." So the emperor changed his mind and subsequently came upon the name "Dansai Zenji"¹⁰ for Ôbaku.

Therefore, "inheriting all of Dansai's golden activity," means that Zen Master Rinzai has inherited the dharma of Zen Master Ôbaku entirely. Master Ôbaku is said to have been of big stature and a broad-minded man. Rinzai, who inherited his dharma, certainly couldn't afford simply to be mild and gentle.

Then how should he just stay peaceful? It's indeed impossible for Rinzai, as heir to Ôbaku's dharma, to remain quiet and contented. The Main Case is good proof of that.

This style is fairly rare in the Soto Sect. If we compare the *Rinzairoku* and the *Shôyôroku*, we notice the difference in style very clearly. Similarly, in comparing the *Hekiganroku* and the *Shôyôroku*, we see that the former is brisk and energetic, representing the Rinzai style, while the latter exhibits a depth of attainment, a serene and profound inner state. If we compare this with the stages of life of a human being, we could say that the

⁹ It means a sudden break-through with a loud sound.

¹⁰ *Dansai* literally means: "cutting off the complications."

Hekiganroku is like a person in his or her mid-forties to mid-fifties, when you are at the peak of your working capability and intellectual capacity. The *Shôyôroku*, on the other hand, is like someone between sixty and seventy, aged to maturity, calm and composed. But Rinzai can't stay self-composed and gentle, since he inherited the entire golden activity of Dansai.

The mountain deity of Korei raised his hand, and lo, without effort, Great Mount Ka with its ten thousand ridges was split in two. These lines also appear in the Verse to the koan concerning Gutei's finger in the *Mumonkan*¹¹. In fact Mumon borrowed it from his predecessor, Master Setchô. "Korei" is the name of a mountain deity in a Chinese myth, known for his extraordinary power and strength. There was a mountain called Mount Ka which blocked up the flow of the Yellow River, thereby causing it to flood. So, during the reign of King U, Korei lifted up a hand and with one blow cut Mount Ka in two, calling one part Mount Ka, the other part Mount Shuyô and letting the waters of the Yellow River flow between them. It's said that even now the marks of Korei's hands are visible. And here Rinzai is praised for being just like Korei: As the mountain deity broke up the many ridges of Mount Ka with one sharp blow and split it in two, Master Rinzai with one deft stroke shatters innumerable conceptual thoughts and obstinate delusions, the endless "mountains" of ideas and philosophies his disciple is attached to, thus bringing him to full enlightenment.

"He inherited all of Dansai's golden activity; then how should he just stay peaceful? The mountain deity of Korei raised his hand, and lo, without effort, Great Mount Ka with its ten thousand ridges was split in two." Please savor these lines well.

¹¹ Cf. Case 3 of the *Mumonkan*.