

CASE 34

Kyôzan's "Not Wandering"



By Yamada Kôun

Case:

Kyôzan asked a monk, "Where have you come from?" The monk said, "From Mount Ro." Kyôzan said, "Have you wandered among the Five Elder Peaks?" The monk said, "No, I have never been there." Kyôzan said, "Then you have never wandered in the mountains at all!"

Unmon said, "Because of too much compassion these words have fallen into grasses."

Verse:

Entering the grasses, leaving the grasses:

Who knows how to track him down?

The white clouds piled up, the red sun shining bright.

Turn to the left, no blemishes;

Turn to the right, already grown old.

Don't you see the man of Cold Mountain, who disappeared so early?

He has not been able to return for ten years,

And has forgotten the way he came.

Only a day and a half is left in our sesshin. I am well aware that all of you, particularly those practicing toward kensho, are doing your very best. Nevertheless, it's still very difficult to make a clear breakthrough. There are many factors which act as hindrances to coming to clear realization, and these vary from person to person. Even people who have been practicing for quite some time still find it harder than ever to come to realization. What's the reason for this?

One reason is that some of these people have read far too much on the subject of Zen, and this becomes an impediment to their practice. They know all sorts of special terms concerning Zen, such as "Buddha-nature," "real fact," "samadhi," etc., but these are all just concepts and they get in the way of real practice. These people may have read many books on

the subject and gained more or less an intellectual understanding, and that leads them to assume that they now have really understood the subject. But all of this is actually a disturbance to one's practice.

I always tell you that, when you come into the zendo and begin to practice Mu, you must put aside all that you have read or heard about Zen. But so many find this difficult to do. The dokusan room is not a place to bring me your intellectual logic. It is the place where you demonstrate your experience and have it checked to see if it is authentic or not.

If you practice Mu with full devotion, you will eventually come to a sort of saturation point. It's just like the process of crystallization through dissolving some substance in a solvent: when the saturation point has arrived, you can't dissolve any more of the substance. If there is no further stimulus, nothing will happen. But should some slight stimulus be applied to the solution, crystals will begin to form. Those who did some school experiments in chemistry class should be able to recall this very well.

In the practice of Mu, this state of saturation is the condition known as "the time of dying the great death"; it is the point where our self-consciousness has died out. If you just remain in this state of "death," you never arrive at realization. There are any number of things which can then touch off a kensho experience, but they are, after all, just the stimulus applied to this state of saturation. That causes a slight change of angle. Maybe it's difficult to understand, but it's like this: right in the middle of this super-saturated condition, a slight movement of consciousness takes place, then you come to see this state by yourself. And this makes you realize and say, "Oh, there was nothing at all!" By all means you need to get a glimpse of this world of nothingness.

After that experience, you may feel that the world of nothingness and that of phenomena are separate from each other, but that's wrong. As you delve deeper and deeper into the world of nothingness, a new world will open up before your eyes, and you realize that this world which we see and hear around us is nothing but the world of nothingness. – This is the common path of Zen practice.

That's why you are doing your "Mu" with all your resources. That's exactly what you should be doing. But I do want you to perceive your true self at some instant. "What's this? What does this mean?" – the ancient Zen masters would press people hard to realize it. Then you reach a moment when you realize the world of nothingness. That's the entrance to true kensho.

The most important thing is to achieve that saturation point, where you yourself become "full" – full of something. Then, all of a sudden, you realize. I want you to get to that point. Please do your very best today. There is no reason why you can't succeed.

When you get a hold on the true world, then you clearly realize that this is one and the same as the phenomenal world. Then you forget even this and become once again an ordinary person. But this "ordinary person" is somehow different from what he was before. Having attained great enlightenment, you return to the state of an ordinary person who is "like a fool,

like an idiot," as they say. And yet, you are certainly different from what you once were. Take an example from the field of painting. A child paints a picture and we have no idea what it's supposed to be. An accomplished artist paints an abstract and, once again, we don't have any clue what the subject is supposed to be. At first glance, it may resemble a child's scribble, but there is something different. You know, it's like that. You become *like* a child. You don't actually become a child, but you become *just like* a child, void of all concepts. But, at the same time, you must acquire the power to freely use those concepts if need be, to match any reasoning when the occasion demands.

Kyôzan, who appears in today's koan, is such a person. He grasped and thoroughly grasped the true world, then went on to forget that enlightenment totally, to come back to the state of being a completely ordinary person. Of course, all the Zen masters of old were like that.

On the Case:

Kyôzan asked a monk, "Where have you come from?" You have already heard that Zen Buddhism in ancient China was divided into the so-called "five sects and seven schools." Among these Five Sects was the Igyô Sect. The word Igyô comes from combining the names of the founders, Isan and his dharma successor Kyôzan.

One day, a monk came to Kyôzan. "Where have you come from?" – the original wording reads: "Have you come from near or from far?" This actually asks where you are from.

When a monk first comes to a Zen master, before any real instruction can begin, the master must have an idea with whom the student has practiced, how far he or she is advanced in their practice, and what degree of realization he or she has acquired – that is, whether the student is enlightened or not. Kyôzan's question, "Where have you come from?" includes the underlying intention to find out such necessary information on the student.

The monk said, "From Mount Ro." Mount Ro is a famous mountain to the north of Lake Han'yô in China. The area is well known for its scenic beauty, and was once the headquarters of the Nationalist Army under Chiang Kai Shek. As I was reading about this the koan, I discovered a somewhat interesting fact. Mount Ro has another name, Mount Kyô. This *Kyô* is the same character as the one used in my own name, Kyôzô¹. Anyway, from times of old this locality was home for many outstanding personages and monks. In China's Yin Dynasty, for example, there was the famous Kyôyû; during the reign of King Wu of the Chou Dynasty, a certain Kyôzoku was living as a hermit in the area. Also, during the Ryûhō (or Kōso, "Founder Patriarch") era of the Han Dynasty there lived in that area a man named Rozoku, and it was from him that the mountain received its present name of Mount Ro. Rozoku's real

¹ The secular name of Koûn Roshi.

family name, moreover, was Kyô², and it is for this reason that the same mountain is alternately known as Mount Kyô.

Well, to get back to our koan, the monk said, "I have come from Mount Ro." Mount Ro is actually a large mountain with a considerable number of peaks, which include the section known as "the Five Elder Peaks" (Japanese: Gorôhō), noted for its particularly outstanding scenic beauty. **Kyôzan said, "Have you ever wandered among the Five Elder Peaks?" The monk said, "No, I have never been there."** This monk is certainly an honest person. "Where have you come from?" "From Mount Ro." "Have you been to Five Elder's Peak?" "Not yet." It would not be the least bit strange for either an enlightened person or an unenlightened person to answer like this. He's simply stating the facts. But a true master, observing the monk, knows whether he is just talking about ordinary affairs or, having attained kensho, he is talking from the viewpoint of the essential world. The master may not know right away but, as the exchange goes on, he knows.

A similar koan appears as Case 15 of the *Mumonkan*, "Tôzan's Sixty Blows." It deals with Master Tôzan Shusho in his young days prior to his kensho. When Tôzan comes to Unmon for instruction, Unmon asks the same question as Kyôzan in the present koan: "Where have you come from?" Tôzan answers, "From Sado." "Where were you during the summer retreat?" In traditional Zen temples, a period of ninety days was set aside during the summer for the summer retreat [*ge-ango*], a time when the monks stayed in one place to practice. Tôzan answered, "At Hôzu Monastery in Konan, south of the Lake³." He stated the facts as they were. It's still impossible, at this point, to tell whether Tôzan is just talking about everyday matters or whether he has seen something authentic and speaks from that angle. So Unmon probes further and asks, "When did you leave Hôzu Monastery?" Tôzan replies, "On the 25th of August." Here, once again, Tôzan is relating the fact, but, by this time, Unmon already has a firm grasp on the student. – "This fellow doesn't know anything at all." So he reproves Tôzan sharply, saying "I spare you sixty blows." It is almost as if to say, "You deserve being hit sixty times with this stick, but I won't do that because I don't want to dirty my stick." A very sharp rebuke indeed.

Tôzan was unable to sleep the entire night. The next day he went again to Unmon and said, "Yesterday, you scolded me very severely. I beg you, Master, where was I at fault?" Tôzan had, after all, only stated the facts as they were, without any falsehood. But then Unmon scolded him with even greater severity, "Oh you rice bag! Have you been wandering about like that, now west of the river, now south of the lake?" – as if to say, "You rice devourer, you scum bag, what on earth are you doing, wandering around this way and that way? You call yourself a monk and yet you don't know the slightest thing about enlightenment. What are you doing, wasting your time like that?" At that moment, Tôzan finally realized, "Oh, yes!" This

² As in the name Kyôzô.

³ I.e., Lake Dôtei.

is not exactly the same as the crystallization process I was talking about, but, in a similar way, the scolding from Unmon acted as a trigger to set off an eye-opening experience.

The two cases are similar in a sense, but we can witness here two different styles of teaching. Unmon is very clear and transparent. Kyôzan is also very clear, while at the same time possessing a very serene and composed manner. Kyôzan's teacher, Isan, was similar in this way. As his disciple, Kyôzan possessed the afore-mentioned serene and composed bearing while being equipped with a very clear enlightened eye. Thus: "Where have you come from?" "From Mount Ro." "If you come from Mount Ro, you must have also been to Five Elder Peak, that most outstanding of scenic wonders?" "No, I haven't been there yet." At this point Kyôzan realizes that the monk is still ignorant of the world of Zen.

Kyôzan said, "Then you have never wandered in the mountains at all!" He is saying in effect: "You say that you have come from Mount Ro, but you don't understand anything at all about the real pleasure of wandering in the mountains."

There is no record in the koan of what the monk said in reply, but he probably could not attain realization at this point. The koan concludes with a comment which Unmon made at some later time: **Unmon said, "Because of too much compassion these words have fallen into grasses."** For Unmon, who sternly reproved a student saying, "Have you been wandering like that, now west of the river, now south of the lake?" Kyôzan's reply of "You have never wandered in the mountains" was probably too meek and mild. In making his response, Unmon says, Kyôzan descends from the highest level down to the second or third in order to meet the monk on his own terms. In Japanese there is the expression *babâdangi* (grandmother's prattle): please picture grandma chattering away with her little grandson or granddaughter, trying hard to baby-talk although the little child doesn't seem to understand anything. This is probably how Unmon would have appraised Kyôzan's method. And yet I can't help liking Kyôzan immensely. It's not because our names are so similar, yet somehow, I like him.

The Igyô Sect, however, doesn't exist as a living sect in Japan; we can only rely on old koans to get some idea of the spirit of that sect. Today, only the Rinzai and Soto Sects remain, and neither the teachings of the Igyô nor those of the Unmon Sect remain except in koans. Nevertheless, it's interesting to appreciate the spirit of their Zen by studying these koans.

Today's koan has no instruction. If you wish, however, any Instruction can be applied to any case in the collection, because they are all dealing with the same essential matter.

On the Verse:

Leaving the grasses, entering the grasses: who knows how to track him down? "Leaving the grasses" can be taken as referring to the essential world. Having completely cut away the grasses of our own discriminatory concepts and delusions, we leave those grasses behind to encounter the essential. "Entering the grasses" means – comparable to the expression "falling into the grasses" in the main case – to come out of the essential world and go

back into the real world of our daily life. The Verse says that this entering and leaving the grasses is completely free and unfettered, a reference to Kyôzan's state of consciousness. Yet the essential and the phenomenal are not two separate things, they are one and the same thing.

In the *Rinzairoku*, the word *kasha* or "house/home" is used in referring to the essential world. Leaving the house for the outside world is known as *tochû* or "on the way." Thus, the essential and the phenomenal are known respectively as "being at home" and "being on the way." Leaving the grasses is the essential world where we are "at home"; entering the grasses or "falling into grasses" is the phenomenal world in which we are "on the way." As long as we are "at home" we cannot teach and save others. In order to do this, we must leave the house to go outside. The world of Mu, which we realize in kensho, is the world of "being at home." Here there are no living beings to save, no matter how much we may wish to save them. If nobody is in sight, we can do nothing. Unless we emerge from the world of emptiness, there can be no true religious activity. When someone is completely free in this activity, no one can hold him or her down. The minute we think such a person is over here, he or she is already over there. Such a fellow disappears from over there and appears over here; we don't know where he or she is. "Who knows how to track him down?"

Master Dôgen is the epitome of this type of free activity. When we read his writings we see how he moves with complete freedom from one aspect to the other. Ordinary people would run ragged trying to catch up with him. That is a true Zen master.

The white clouds piled up, the red sun shining bright. Clouds over clouds – white clouds are piled up in profusion, and we can't distinguish one thing from another. This is the essential world. On the other hand, the morning sun is shining red and bright. Everything is clear, and you can see all things. On one side, the white clouds piled up high; on the other, the scarlet sun shining brilliantly. In speaking about the essential world we sometimes use the phrase "not a speck of cloud obstructing the eyes," but here the same world is depicted with the image of layers of clouds: we cannot see anything at all, no matter how hard we look. Yet, on the other hand, the morning sun is shining bright, and everything is clear and distinct.

There are some who see the phrase as referring to two different positions. They take the white clouds as referring to Kyôzan and the red sun as referring to Unmon. This may not be impossible, but I prefer to see both phrases as referring to Kyôzan's state of consciousness. After all, Unmon only appears at the very end of the koan with his brief comment, "Because of too much compassion these words have fallen into grasses." So, all the more I feel all the more that the verse is a reference to Kyôzan.

Turn to the left, no blemishes; turn to the right, already grown old. If you turn to the left, it is clear and shining without a blemish. This phrase refers to the essential world. It is just like a clear sparkling jewel lacking a single stain. If you turn your eyes to the right, it has already become old – it is already fully mature. Having realized the essential world, you go on to forget that enlightenment and to rid yourself of all traces of it, until you reach a truly mature state of consciousness. I feel these lines too are spoken in reference to Kyôzan. Remember his

words to the monk, "Then you have never wandered in the mountains at all." What a wonderful atmosphere of composed dignity and serenity! If this were Unmon he would surely have rebuked the monk with stronger words like, "Have you been wandering about like that, now west of the river, now south of the lake?"

Let me go back here a little to the initial question in the main case. It certainly is the work of a Zen master to make use of the totally ordinary in order to check just how far the student has gone in realizing the essential world. In reference to this, I would like to cite a case from the *Shôyôroku* which features Master Hôgen, who was the founder of the Hôgen Sect, another of the five sects of Zen Buddhism. He was an outstanding Zen master. One day, Hôgen received a visit from Senior Monk Kaku (probably Tesshi-Kaku, a disciple of Jôshû), also a Zen person of high caliber. Hôgen asked him, "Have you come by sea or by land?" This is the same question as "Where have you come from?" Kaku answered, "I have come by sea." This is stating things just as they are, and it is still impossible at this point to tell his degree of realization. Hôgen said, "Where is the boat?" Kaku answered, "In the river." Here again, he is speaking of the ordinary. And with these words Kaku apparently took his leave. Later on, Hôgen asked his disciples who were with him, "Now tell me, did the monk who was here just now have an eye or not?" By doing this he intends to evaluate those monks' levels of realization. Thus, even if someone gives exactly the same answer, the true master knows by the minute actions of the monk whether he is authentic or not. It seems to be just ordinary small talk, but, interestingly enough, it is enough to discover just how much the student understands. "How was it today in Kamakura? How was your bus ride?" "Oh, it was terribly crowded!" Talking about the most ordinary matters. But what if we listen to this in the spirit of this koan? It wouldn't be easy in such an exchange to tell if the person was an accomplished Zen person, would it?

Don't you see the man of Cold Mountain, who disappeared so early? The author of the verse cites as an example "the man of Cold Mountain" in order to sing of a true Zen person, a leisurely person of the way, who has completely realized it and then gone on to totally forget that realization. "The man of Cold Mountain" is a reference to Kanzan⁴, who appears very often with his partner Jittoku. At Kokusei-ji, a temple on Tendai Mountain in China, there once lived an outstanding master by the name of Master Bukan⁵. At this temple, an eccentric, vagabond-type monk by the name of Jittoku was in charge of a job akin to that of the *tenzo* [cook]. His closest companion was Kanzan, who lived near Kokusei-ji (he probably got his name "Kanzan" [cold mountain] from the place where he lived). Sometimes Kanzan would come to the temple to receive the leftovers from Jittoku the cook. Kanzan was a truly odd fellow, having an appearance which made it difficult to tell whether he was a monk or a beggar. However, this same Kanzan composed poetry. Jittoku did too, but it is mainly Kanzan's poems which survive today. One look at his work – *Kanzan-shi* – is enough to realize that he was no

⁴ Literally: "cold mountain."

⁵ In the 9th century.

ordinary beggar monk but quite a Zen personage.

Setchô is thus inviting readers to pay close attention to this Kanzan: "Don't you see the man of Cold Mountain, who disappeared so early?" Look at that man, it is already a long time since he entered the mountain. He probably went there when he was still young.

He has not been able to return for ten years, and has forgotten the way he came.

These lines refer to the last two lines in a poem from the *Kanzan-shi* mentioned above. The poem starts as follows:

*If you wish to attain a place where peace of mind prevails,
Preserve the Cold Mountain for a long time.*

We can take "Cold Mountain" [*Kanzan*] here to mean the essential world. The next lines in the poem are quite well-known (and are used as a koan in the Rinzai line of practice):

*A gentle breeze blows through the lonesome pines;
If you listen from nearby, the sound is all the more friendly.*

Then:

*Underneath the tree is a man with white-streaked hair,
Who is reading Huang-Lao aloud.*

These lines can be savored in a way which has nothing to do with Zen, and there are many people who approach them that way. But let's look at them with Master Hakuin, who wrote a commentary on this poem from a Zen point of view:

"If you wish to reach a state of true tranquility you must first of all attain kensho, acquire the Buddha's Wisdom and never lose hold of this for all eternity. You must keep embodying the precepts in the formless heart-ground, and safeguard the life of Wisdom. If this is lost even for a short while, then you are like a dead man.

*'A gentle breeze blows through the pines;
If you listen from nearby the sound is all the more friendly.'*

Any comment on Kanzan's true being could only be a blemish. Hear also the ancient verse:

*'When I listen closely to the sharp wind in the pines,
The moon being so bright,
Lo, it is just this sound of the wind in the pines!'*

Back to the original poem, and now follow the last lines:

*He has not been able to return for ten years,
And has forgotten the way he came.*

What are these lines talking about? To "enter the mountain" is to enter the world of satori. Having subsequently continued to practice for ten years, he has completely forgotten that satori. To "forget the way by which he came" is to forget both the essential ("at home") and the phenomenal ("on the way") worlds. This can be applied to Kyôzan's state of consciousness. In the *Rinzairoku* this is referred to in the expression: "Subject and object both forgotten" [*Ninkyô tomoni bôzu*]. There is also the expression: "House destroyed and person forgotten" [*ie yabure*,

hito bôzu]. This can all be seen as referring to Kyôzan's state of consciousness, where subject and object have both disappeared.