

CASE 46

Kyôshô's Raindrops



By Yamada Kôun

Instruction:

One strike of the gavel and Buddhahood is achieved, transcending the ordinary and overreaching the holy. With half a phrase a settlement is made, undoing fetters and loosening attachments. Like walking across icy peaks or running over knife edges. Though he sits within a heap of sounds and colors, he passes over the top of sounds and colors. Putting aside for the moment the wondrous and completely free activity, what about the time when one fully realizes in an instant. To test I bring this forth. Look!

Case:

Kyôshô asked a monk, "What is that sound outside the gate?" The monk said, "The sound of raindrops." Kyôshô said, "Living beings, turned upside down, are deluded to themselves and pursue objects." The monk said, "How is it for you, Master?" Kyôshô said, "I almost became deluded to myself." The monk said, "What does it mean to say, 'I almost became deluded to myself'?" Kyôshô said, "Although it should be easy to become one, to leave oneness can be said to be difficult."

Verse:

The empty hall, the sound of raindrops.
Even a great master finds it difficult to respond.
If you say that you already turned the stream within,
You still do not understand.
Understanding, not understanding.
South Mountain, North Mountain---a general downpour.

On the Instruction:

We have now about a day-and-a-half left in our sesshin, and the merit of your sitting has resulted in great power of concentration. Is it really in our best interests, I sometimes ask myself, to present a teisho at such a time or not? Might it not be better just to continue

sitting? Nevertheless, given that it's the custom to present a teisho almost every day of the sesshin, I speak today on "Kyôshô's Raindrops." Those who have realized their true self will probably have a general idea of what I am talking about, but those are still working toward kensho might not find this teisho of much use.

One strike of the gavel and Buddhahood is achieved, transcending the ordinary and overreaching the holy. With half a phrase a settlement is made, releasing fetters and loosening attachments. The "gavel" here is a *byakutsui* [lit.: "white gavel"], an octagonal block of wood used in a Zen temple setting to give signals and call for attention. One strike of the gavel is enough to accomplish Buddhahood, to achieve enlightenment. There have been two interpretations offered for these lines in the Zen tradition, one seeing them as referring to the Zen practitioner and the other viewing them as a reference to the Zen master. When these lines are applied to the practitioner, they refer to that extremely adept student for whom one rap of the gavel is enough to bring about enlightenment. This would also hold for the next line concerning a half phrase which is enough to bring about a settlement.

If we see these lines as referring to the Zen master, they describe a teacher with exceptional ability and function who can bring his or her students to enlightenment with one rap of the gavel. Examining the main case in light of these lines, one is almost certain that they are a reference to Kyôshô and his outstanding power as a Zen teacher. The monk who appears in this koan is certainly not the type to come to enlightenment at one strike of the gavel.

The great power of a Zen master which allows him or her to instantaneously bring about enlightenment by a single blow from the stick transcends both the ordinary and the holy. It is certainly not any everyday teacher who is able to bring about realization with one strike of the gavel. It transcends by far the power of so-called "saints," not to mention that of ordinary beings.

With half a phrase a settlement is made, undoing fetters and loosening attachments. Here is the activity of a person who keeps company with the likes of Jôshû, a master who needed only to mumble a word or two to bring his students to enlightenment. "Fetter" means the bonds with which we tie ourselves up and render ourselves prisoners. The Chinese character for attachments in the original text means "sticky substance" or being "stuck fast" to something. This is the common fate of all of us ordinary beings. There is the phrase in Japanese *jibô-jibaku* which means to get caught in a trap of one's own making, to be stuck in a prison of one's own devising. We are bound by fetters which don't exist in actuality. Although we are actually completely free, we tie ourselves up with the fetters of our own habits of thinking. We are continually getting stuck to something. When someone says something to us we are immediately swayed in that direction, only to be swayed the other way when someone else says something to the contrary. We're like the swinging doors at the entrance to the toilet, always being pushed this way or that, and never becoming our own persons. If you fail to establish your own views you will constantly be pulled hither and thither by what others

say. This is a form of illness which no ordinary doctor can treat; only zazen can provide the cure. Our attachments and all that deprive us of freedom resemble the sticky, stringy fiber which is found in the lotus root and which is so hard to cut. Even though our most obvious delusions are relatively easy to do away with, the sticky attachments remaining in our emotional lives are just like sticky stringy taffy which resists all efforts to break away from it. It is such things—in other words, all that which ties us down and deprives us of our freedom—which an outstanding Zen master can cut away with immediate assurance.

All human beings have their quirks and habits. Some have the tendency to talk big and put on airs, playing the hero. Others carry on unaware of their slovenly habits and still others are picky about the slightest thing. These are all illnesses. There is the saying in Japanese *nakute nanakuse* which means roughly "Say you have none and you already have seven bad habits!" This is the Japanese equivalent of "every man has his faults." All of us, upon reflection, will discover faults aplenty in our characters and we will have to work hard to rid ourselves of them.

Like walking across icy peaks or running over knife edges. Though he sits within a heap of sounds and colors, he passes over the top of sounds and colors. Putting aside for the moment the wondrous and completely free activity, what about the time when one fully realizes in an instant. To test I bring this forth. Look! If we were walking across peaks of ice we would have to be on our guard constantly to avoid slipping. The same would hold, of course, for running across knife edges! Even a split-second of carelessness could mean our deaths. This is all a reference, of course, to the total alertness of the true Zen adept for whom even a single moment of distraction is already too much. This can also be taken as a simile for that which is quick and nimble, but I prefer to see it as referring to the wonderfully taut second-by-second alertness which characterizes the power of a truly outstanding Zen master.

"Colors and sounds" is a reference to the phenomenal world. Even though we are sitting right in the midst of the phenomenal world we have transcended it completely. This is not only the possession of the Zen master. In fact, each one of you, although you see and hear the various phenomena of the phenomenal world, are actually, in your most essential self, completely transcending the world of color and sound. It is from here that a wondrously free activity emerges in the case of the Zen master.

Nevertheless, shelving for the moment all talk about this wondrously free activity, what about that time when a person fully realizes in an instant? I will now give an example of this and you must look carefully.

On the Case:

Kyôshô asked a monk, "What is that sound outside the gate?" The monk said, "The sound of raindrops." Kyôshô said, "Living beings, turned upside down, are deluded to themselves and pursue objects." Evidently it happened to be raining just at the time of this

exchange. One could hear the sound of the rain dripping from the eaves. Kyôshô said to a monk, "There's a sound outside. What is it?" The monk said, "That's the sound of raindrops, Master." This is certainly not wrong. In his short critical comment appended to this answer, Engo has the following to say: "An honest soul is hard to find!"

In response, Kyôshô says, "Living beings, turned upside down, are deluded to themselves and pursue objects." Upon hearing the sound, the monk immediately takes this as something outside himself, as if it had no relation to himself whatsoever. Such are living beings, turned upside down with their own delusions. In actuality it is one. But failing to realize this, they chase after that which is outside themselves. This is the common fault of unenlightened persons. They don't know who they are. Without even knowing what it is they are chasing after, they are constantly looking outside themselves. A classic example is scientific inquiry. Science is ceaselessly pursuing the external world, never bringing into question the one who is investigating. Thus the phrase: "Living beings, turned upside down, are deluded to themselves and pursue objects." They are deluded to the self. Although things are intrinsically one, they can only see this as a standoff between self and other, subject and object.

The monk said, "How is it for you, Master?" Kyôshô said, "I almost became deluded to myself." The monk said, "What does it mean to say, 'I almost became deluded to myself'?" Kyôshô said, "Although it should be easy to become one, to leave oneness can be said to be difficult." The monk is making a counter-attack, and a good one at that. "Aren't you also one of those living beings?" he seems to be asking? Kyôshô answers, "I almost became deluded to myself."

There have been various interpretations and readings given for this particular answer, all of which can be classified into two main categories of interpretation. The first possibility is that Kyôshô is speaking of himself and saying, "I almost became deluded to myself." The second possible way of translating the original Chinese is to see Kyôshô as addressing his remarks to the monk, in which case he is saying something like, "Don't be deluded to yourself." I prefer to take the more conventional interpretation and see it as meaning, "I almost became deluded to myself." This is also the interpretation favored by Yasutani Roshi.

What does this mean, then? "I just missed by a hairsbreadth being deluded to myself, too!" I came within an inch of being deluded. Why would Kyôshô say something like that? At the start of the exchange Kyôshô asks, "What is that sound outside the gate?" This is setting up inside and outside where there is actually neither. When he asks, "What is that sound?", the temptation is all too strong to chase after that which is outside ourselves. But, even granted that he said this, he has not actually strayed from the essential. Thus he can say "I almost became deluded to myself." Notice that he says "almost" which means that he wasn't deluded after all.

But the monk doesn't understand and asks, "What does it mean to say, 'I almost became deluded to myself'?" "What is the meaning of your words, Master?", he is asking.

Actually, of course, there is no meaning. If there were meaning it would be philosophy and not Zen. Kyôshô continues: "To become one is easy but to leave oneness is difficult." "To become one" means to realize the world of oneness in the satori experience. Here everything is one because it is completely empty. For example, to realize that you are one with a sound is not that difficult. There are several of you sitting here who have realized this for yourselves as well as people who are on the verge of realizing it. But how about leaving that world of oneness? To borrow the words of Dôgen Zenji, we could say something like the following: "Body and mind fallen away is not that difficult, but the fallen way body and mind is difficult indeed." We must realize for ourselves this world where the essential is completely revealed and exposed in seeing the world of total emptiness face-to-face. In practicing zazen, we start out by experiencing things in the duality of self and other or subject and object. But they are actually one and the same. It is this fact which we must realize.

To use my favorite comparison, from the standpoint of the life which is in me, everything which seems to be outside and separate is actually one. For example, if I put one of my hairs and my fingernail clipping next to each other, no one would consider them to be the same. As individual phenomena they are quite different from each other. However, viewed from the standpoint of the same single life which they possess, they are both living the same single life which is me. In other words, I and this strand of hair and this sliver of nail all seem to be quite different. But since life happens to be coursing through my body they are all one and the same life. They are one.

I also feel that what we call "life" is the same as that which we refer to as "the essential world." To have grasped the essential world, our essential nature, means that we have clearly realized Mu which has neither form nor color. The same could be said about what we call "life." Life itself has no form or color, but that it exists is beyond the shadow of a doubt. When we think in terms of life, our attention is focused on the activity, the movement by which life makes itself manifest. But that which causes things to move cannot itself be seen or apprehended. I feel free, therefore, to state that the true self is life itself. We cannot point to life and say, "It is here" or "It is there." This situation also holds for what we call the essential world. They are not two different things. The discussion has become rather involved, but I want to emphasize that, as of late, I have come to think that the essential world is just another name for life. Why? Because there is nothing which we could call a "place" where they are. We cannot locate them in the universe. Life also transcends time and space. We all have to realize the essential world. In other words, all that appears to be in dualistic opposition to us is actually one with us. We are completely one with the entire universe. "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form," as the Hannyashingyô Sutra tells us. How can we grasp this? The ways are numerous, but one of them is the koan Mu. This is reaching the essential through sound. Bassui Zenji urged on his students on by asking, "Who is it that hears?"

The monk in today's koan is still hearing the sound raindrops as something outside and separate from himself. It's a matter of discovering who the hearer is through earnest

internal inquiry. The most representative example of this is the Bodhisattva Kannon [Jpn.: *Kanzeon Bosatsu*]. "Zeon" in Kanzeon means "the sounds of the world." Kanzeon means "the one who sees the sounds of the world." "See" in this instance means to consider "What is that sound?" or "Who is it that hears?" It is almost a type of reflection or even a philosophy. Kanzeon Bosatsu "sees the sounds of the world" and realizes. With this in mind, let us look now at the verse.

On the Verse:

The empty hall, the sound of raindrops. Even a great master finds it difficult to respond. A hall which is totally deserted. The sound of rain dripping from the eaves can be heard. We might be tempted to imagine an old, dilapidated temple. But remember that the hall is completely empty. This is we ourselves. Many Zen teachers will look at this from an objective standpoint and paint a scene of sitting alone in an empty hall listening to the sound of rain dripping from the eaves. I prefer to see "empty hall" as referring to us people. There is no one there at all. Just the sound of the rain and nothing else. Even the greatest Zen master has no way of responding to this. (This is only to be expected, since there is no "other" involved). You must all go on to directly grasp "the empty hall, the sound of rain."

If you say that you already turned the stream within, You still do not understand. The "stream" is our consciousness or subjectivity which is a never-ending flow. In the koan one hears the sound of rain and begins to wonder, "What is that sound?" And in this way the stream flows on!

Turning "the stream within" is used in the same sense as the passage in Dôgen Zenji's *Fukanzazengi* which runs: "You must learn how to allow the light to shine inwardly." In this case, it is turning inward and returning to "the one who hears" by questioning ourselves with "who is it that hears?" However, so long as you are still pursuing an answer with this practice of questioning, this is still *shushôhen*, the aspect of practice toward enlightenment; it is still the process of practice prior to grasping the true fact. Thus, as the verse says, "you still do not understand." You are still only halfway and have yet to truly understand.

Regarding this matter of "turning the stream within" there is a reference to the Bodhisattva Kannon in the *Surangama Sutra* which I would like to mention here.

Shakyamuni spoke to a vast assembly of his disciples, asking them to describe the circumstances by which they came to enlightenment. The disciples took turns recounting their flashes of insight. The last one to speak was Kanzeon Bosatsu (the Bodhisattva Kannon), whose account is recorded as follows.

At that time the Bodhisattva Kannon arose from his seat, received the feet of the Buddha¹ and spoke to the Buddha saying, 'World-honored One, I silently

¹ I.e., prostrated in the spirit of receiving the feet of the Buddha.

contemplated for kalpas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges and thereby manifested myself in the Buddha-world."

A kalpa is a unit of time which, according to tradition, is the length of time needed to wear away a granite block measuring 40 cubic miles if an angel were to appear once every 100 years and lightly touch it once with his feathered cape. Thus, "kalpas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges" is a very long time indeed! "When I recall that time so very long ago," he continues, "there was a Buddha at that time."

"There was a Buddha who appeared in the world who was called Kanzeon ("seeing the sounds of the world"). I raised up the Bodhisattva spirit in contact with that Buddha. That Buddha taught me how to enter samadhi through the three wisdoms of hearing, thinking, and practice.'

Bodhisattva spirit [Jpn.: *bodaishin*] is "going up in search of the Bodhi wisdom and going down to save living beings" [Jpn.: *jôgubodai-gekeshujô*]. In other words, it is the spirit of great compassion whereby we realize the highest truth and save all beings. The three wisdoms of hearing, thinking and practice are the means used to enter samadhi. In short, he was told to practice by asking himself, "Who is it that hears?"

In the midst of the first hearing, I changed the course of the stream and forgot all place."

Here again we find the phrase "turning the stream within." To turn the stream within is to turn the stream of consciousness within by practicing "who is it that hears?" To say "I forgot all place" means that the objective world disappeared and that he entered the world of oneness. There are various ways to enter the world of oneness. In this instance it was sound---a realization brought about by pursuing the question, "Who is it that hears?" When the Bodhisattva Kannon finished relating his experience, the Buddha said, "I have listened to all of your experiences. Which one is the best? I will eventually pass away and you will have to practice without me here. Which experience will be the best, then?"

It was the Bodhisattva Manjusri who stood up to answer the Buddha's question. "It is Bodhisattva Kannon, after all, who is the best." The Buddha said, "Good, good. It is Bodhisattva Kannon who has succeeded most of all in achieving the Nirvana-mind." In other words, although there are many ways towards accomplishing Buddhahood, according to the Surangama Sutra the practice of asking "Who is it that hears?" is the best.

It was Bassui Zenji who practiced this method faithfully and to perfection. Among those who followed this teaching of Bassui Zenji and went on to achieve perfect enlightenment was Takusui Oshô who lived to be 125 years old and authored the Takusui Hôgo ("Dharma Talks of Takusui Oshô"). The real problem, however, lies in forgetting all accumulated knowledge. In other words, it means completely forgetting the objective world. The essential matter is to practice to the point where the objective world disappears and the world of oneness springs forth.

Since there was no koan Mu at that time, this "Who is it that hears" was a koan of a sort.

Shakyamuni Buddha forgot everything in just sitting.

Nevertheless, as the verse says, as long as we are still pursuing the question of "who is it that hears?" it is still not the real thing; it is still the process of practice toward enlightenment. Thus, "you still do not understand." In other words, you have yet to realize the true fact.

Understanding, not understanding. Realization—no realization. What is it when you get down to it? What is understanding? What is not understanding? This is neither understanding nor not understanding. Whether you say "realized" or "not realized" there still remains as before the element of thinking about it intellectually.

"Understanding, not understanding"---neither of them hit the nail on the head when it comes to the real fact. We must pursue the matter in our practice of asking "what is understanding or not understanding?" and thereby clearly grasp the world which transcends both realization and non-realization. The state of affairs following that realization is described in the final lines of the verse.

South Mountain, North Mountain—a general downpour. On North Mountain and South Mountain it's raining cats and dogs! Just that. "Wow, what a downpour!" Nothing else. If you think, "Oh, that's rain," you're already wrong. It's still outside of you. But if you say it's rain, it's also not wrong! For if you have grasped the true fact, everything is right. North Mountain, South Mountain -- just a general downpour. Just that fact.

You should now go on to sit your hardest. It's important now to forget everything I've just said. You're not to have your head filled with the contents of the teisho. Forget everything and only sit with complete attention.