

CASE 4

*The World-Honored One Points  
to the Ground*

By Yamada Kôun



*Instruction:*

**Raise a grain of dust just slightly, and the great earth is completely contained within it. Riding a steed with spear in hand, founding a strong nation and extending the land. With the ability to be master whatever the place, to be one with the fundamental matter whatever the circumstance. What sort of person is this?**

*Case:*

**When the World Honored One was walking with the assembly, he pointed with his hand to the ground and said, “Here would be a good place to erect a temple.” Sakadevendra took a blade of grass, inserted it in the ground, and said, “The temple is erected.” The World Honored One smiled.**

*Verse:*

**On the tips of the hundred grasses, the spring without end.  
Leaving things to his hands, he is intimate with the matter in uplifting it.  
The sixteen foot golden body, an aggregate of virtue,  
Accompanying the others in regal ease, he enters the world of red dust.  
In the midst of the dust, he can be the master.  
From the world beyond change comes naturally the guest.  
Wherever he is, he follows his lot in life and is satisfied,  
Not disdaining to be no match for the person of ability.**

*On the Instruction:*

If we ask what the true aspect of the universe is, that is made clear in coming to enlightenment through the practice of zazen. Although there are many ways of expressing it, the most simple and direct expression is “one is all, all is one.” One is everything, and everything is one. That is the true fact, in a word. In the world of phenomena we normally cannot say such a thing, or even imagine it. But the world of the true fact is actually such a world. Such a world (the world in which one is all and all is one) cannot be understood unless we practice zazen and come to realization. As I tell you repeatedly by means of an example, I can think of my entire body as the totality. What I am saying is that even a single finger is the entire body. The entire body is this single finger. I have just expressed this view of things with the example of my body, although the very same thing can be said about the entire

universe. That is the true world. It is true enough that there is just this one finger, but if that finger were suddenly to be cut off, it would not be just the finger that feels pain, but the entire body. We can therefore say that one is everything, that the entire body is exhausted in a single finger. If we attempt to understand it intellectually, we proceed from the finger to the arm and from the arm to the entire body as the totality. Or take the example of Mt. Fuji. The universe and Mt. Fuji are one. One is everything. To explain this fact, we can point out that Mt. Fuji does not stop at its foot. It gradually becomes level land that extends to and connects with the ocean, eventually becoming the entire earth. There is no mistaking that this is a case of the one being the entirety. But this is still on an intellectual level. This is different from the world of “one is many” that we experience directly in the enlightenment of Zen. Imagine, for example, a motion picture in a movie theater. Before the film starts there is just the blank screen with nothing on it. Imagine now that a single black spot appears on the screen. The entire screen is a continuation of that black spot. The same is true about the entire universe. We have to realize this fact clearly. It is not that there is a single black point in the middle of the screen. The fact is that the black point is no other than the screen, and the screen is the black point. This is the relationship they find themselves in. Hearing such an intellectual explanation, you are not quite sure if you understand or not, but the fact is that there is just one. When all is said and done, we must practice zazen and come to a direct experience of this reality. And even if you experience kensho, in the beginning you are still not sure if you really understand or not, since there are still the dregs of intellectual reasoning remaining in that experience. But if you continue to deepen in your practice until not a shred of doubt remains, at that point you experience great enlightenment (jap, daigo tettei). This is what the Instruction is referring to here. The Instructions to the cases in this koan collection were composed by Elder Banshō (jap, Banshō Rōjin). We can consider them to be an explanation made in view of the Main Case or a teaching. This is how he writes in the present Instruction:

**Raise a grain of dust just slightly, and the great earth is completely contained within it.** If we pick up a grain of dust, the entire universe is contained within it. Although the original text speaks about “the great earth,” it is not only the earth but also the entire universe that can fit within that grain of dust. In the *Shinjinmei* (Poem on the Mind of Faith) this same fact is expressed in the words: One is everything, everything is one. In the *Kegon Sutra*, the same thing is expressed as follows: “In the many to know the one, in the one to know the many.” This is saying the same thing, although the wording is slightly more complicated. The expression “one is everything, everything is one” is more simple and direct. In olden times the scholar Gibōshi was reading a sutra, which contained the passage, “Mt. Sumeru contains a poppy seed, a poppy seed contains Mt. Sumeru.” Mt. Sumeru is a huge mountain according to Indian mythology. The text states that a single poppy seed is contained therein. And then comes the statement that Mt. Sumeru is contained in a single poppy seed. If we have realized the world of “one is all, all is one,” we have no problem accepting this. But the man reading the sutra was a scholar, and could not understand it, no matter how he tried. He then went to the Zen master Jōchi Zenji of Kisu and said: “There is this passage in the sutra. What could it mean?” In reply the master said. “You have read ten-thousand scrolls of sutras, haven’t you?”

“I have read quite a lot of sutras.”

“They are all in your head, aren’t they?”

“No, although I haven’t memorized them all, I have a considerable number of them in my head.”

“Your head is like that poppy seed.”

At these words the scholar was ready to accept that Mt. Sumeru could fit inside a poppy seed.

But this is still on the level of an explanation; it is still chopping logic. Why? Because if we are still thinking of the poppy seed and Mt. Sumeru as two separate things, it is not yet the real fact. Actually, however, the entire universe is contained in our mind or our consciousness. This is all right to say in the world of philosophy. In the world of philosophy, because we always begin with the standoff between subject and object, that may be all right. I

was still in the First High School of the prewar school system when I heard my first lectures in philosophy presented by the famous teacher Iwamoto Tei. He started out by defining philosophy as follows: “When Man, as a limited existence, attempts to sum up the limitless universe, this is called philosophy.” We are limited existences in that we are contained in a body of a certain limited height and live a certain number of years. Philosophy can be understood as the attempt of this limited existence to clarify the unlimited universe. I was duly impressed by this definition at the time. But considering the matter now, I must conclude that this is not the true state of affairs. As long as there is a duality consisting of a limited self and an unlimited universe, we can never truly understand the true fact. In that explanation there is a thinking self here and the object of thought, separate and opposed to me. So long as we commence from that premise, we will remain unable to grasp the truth. When all is said and done, we must grasp that the world is one. Take this light bulb here, for example. There is the light emitted by the light bulb. The light bulb and the light are one. As long as we consider the light bulb and the light emitted from it to be separate, it is not the true fact. The fact is: “The light bulb is the light, the light is the light bulb.” There are several Catholic priests practicing at this zendo. I have the feeling that the same must hold true for God. God, from our standpoint, is the light emanating from the light bulb. If this becomes two separate things, it is not the true fact. It must by all means become one. The matter of becoming one with something is still the element of practice and enlightenment (jap, *shushôhen*). We must realize the world that is one from the very beginning. It is not a matter of making efforts to somehow cause two to be one. Our efforts are made to discover the truth. And to discover that truth, we must become one with it. When I give a teisho on the koan Mu, I say that you have to be fully absorbed in the samadhi of Mu practice (*muji zammai*) before you can grasp the world of oneness. But the true world is not found in those efforts to become one with it. It is found in the world that is grasped as a result of those efforts. It is easy to misunderstand this point. Although we speak of entering a state of samadhi through the practice of Mu, for example, I regret to say that in some circles of the Rinzai Sect, where the teaching is on an inferior level, it is taught that the effort of entering samadhi itself is the true fact. But this is an error. This is still “on the way,” so to speak. The world of the true fact that is grasped as a result of that meditation is the true world. Lately I have been wondering why Dôgen Zenji, who started out in his writings by praising Rinzai Zenji, suddenly assumed a critical stance toward him. I feel this is a major theme of Zen and can't help thinking that it has a subtle relationship to what I am talking about here. Let us proceed now to the next line in the Instruction.

**Riding a steed with spear in hand, founding a strong nation and extending the land.** We can picture a mounted warrior with spear in hand, charging into the enemy lines. What is this line talking about? It is talking about the matter of Mu. Riding the horse with spear in hand is the practice of Mu. With the single spear of Mu we plunge into the fray, thus opening up the land, that is, ridding ourselves of all delusions and gaining a firm grasp on the essential world. Such a matter is not so rare and can be achieved. Although many have come to kensho, it is difficult indeed to harmonize that true self with one's personality and truly personalize it. And what happens when we succeed in making that experience part and parcel of our entire personality? You are the master wherever you go. This is of course a different matter indeed from people who are not satisfied until they can push their weight around wherever they go in a show of officiousness. In connection with this I recall the following anecdote. During Japan's Meiji Period there was a monk who, whenever there was a gathering of monks, would always press to the fore and sit down in the middle of all the others. One day, the monks had a powwow and decided that one of their number would go forward and sit in the place where that monk usually sat. Then the other monk came in and discovered that his place had been taken. The monk who had sat down first told him so. “In that case,” said the other, “I'll sit down here!” And he promptly sat down in the *tokonoma*, which is the recess in a Japanese room where calligraphy and brush paintings are hung, and hardly a place to sit down! This could never be termed a case of “being the master in any place.” The one who is truly master wherever he is must be the person who promptly sits in

the last seat and knows that “in heaven and on earth, I alone am honored,” to quote the words of the Buddha. You must realize that each of us exhausts the entire universe, that each of us is alone and honored in the entire universe, with no one above or below us. But it is difficult indeed to reach that state. Among my high school classmates was Mr. Sasaki, a man who went far in the world. Although he has since retired, this gentle and genial man was once the Governor of the Bank of Japan. At an alumni gathering there were also members of the House of Representatives on hand. But Mr. Sasaki made it a practice to sit in the back, although he himself was not aware of doing anything special. Seeing him, however, I was struck by his outstanding attitude. This is what is actually meant by the line “with the ability to be master whatever the place.” What about the next line?

**To be one with the fundamental matter whatever the circumstance.**

“Circumstance” can be understood here as all things in the phenomenal world. The world of phenomenon develops by means of human beings. It is saying basically the same thing as the former line: whenever and wherever. The “fundamental matter” is the essential world. In referring to the world of the true essence, in other words, we say that “phenomena themselves are the essence; difference is itself equality.” These lines refer to the person who never lets the fire of the essential go out. Whatever the environment, whatever the circumstances, whatever the occasion, he never loses hold of the essential. “Is there such a person?” the Instruction asks us. Who is such a person? An example will be given now and we are to look carefully. This is said to lead us into the Main Case. One has the feeling that these words in the Instruction, instead of referring to Shakyamuni Buddha, are referring to Sakadevendra (jap, Taishakuten).

**On the Case:**

**When the World Honored One was walking with the assembly, he pointed with his hand to the ground and said, “Here would be a good place to erect a temple.” Sakadevendra took a blade of grass, inserted it in the ground, and said, “The temple is erected.” The World Honored One smiled.** Evidently Shakyamuni was on pilgrimage with the rest of the assembly. He was accompanied by a great multitude. Or maybe he was taking a walk in the mountains. At any rate, he pointed with his finger to the ground and said, “Here would be a good place to erect a temple.” Of the Chinese characters used here for temple (jap, *bonsatsu*) the first character *bon* means pure and clear, while *satsu* means a pure country. Upon hearing these words of the Buddha, the deity Sakadevendra listened with attention. This is not a deity or God in the Christian sense. Sakadevendra was the deity living in the *Trayastrmsa*, the sixth of the seventh heavens of desire in the Buddhist cosmology. In Buddhism there are many heavens, but even the world of persons without a body are worlds of delusion, and not the world of true enlightenment. The propagation activities of Shakyamuni Buddha were not limited to the world of human beings. The world of Saba is the world of human beings. Evidently the deity Sakadevendra was present as a guest of the Buddha. He took a blade of grass and stuck it in the ground in the location where the Buddha had pointed and said, “The temple is erected.” The Buddha smiled, signaling that he was highly gratified with Sakadevendra’s reaction. Sticking a blade of grass in the ground and saying, “the temple is erected.” What could this mean? Please recall what I said before about the one being the many and the many being the one. In the fraction I am always citing, where anything can be placed in the numerator, the numerator in this case is a blade of grass. Wherever we are, it is always dead center. So Sakadevendra is right in saying “the temple is erected.” At any time, it is the center of the universe; it is the essential world. That is the true temple. The temple erected in the world of phenomena will collapse some day. The time will come when no one is in it. The other day, my younger brother returned from a two-week trip to China. He telephoned me when he came back and when I asked him how the trip had been, he told me I would be disappointed if I were to go there. Evidently there are many splendid temples there, but there are no monks living in them. When it comes to the temples in the phenomenal world, the ones whose form still remains may still be all right. But some day that

form will disappear. I joked with my brother, saying maybe I should go there and become an abbot of one of the temples. But what's the real temple, when we get down to brass tacks? It has to be a case of "this very mind is the Zen hall" (jap, *jikishin kore dôjô*). We have to realize that the true temple is within our minds. This is not the individual mind, but the mind of the entire universe. The temple erected in our true mind will never crumble, no matter what happens. Otherwise, it is not a true case of "the temple is erected." Before I decided to build this zendo we searched high and low for a suitable location for a Zen hall. I first did so in the company of Yasutani Roshi. On being told that the late Mr. Tani had some land on the Izu Peninsula, I accompanied Yasutani Roshi to look at the site. But no matter where we went, we could not find a really suitable location. And then my wife said, "If you build a zendo in the mountains of Izu, no one will ever come there. Although our own property may be small, why don't we build a zendo here?" And upon erecting the zendo, we realized that, though it may be small, it serves its purpose. I recall that process now in reading this koan. I would like all of you to realize that the one is the many and the many is the one, and the fact that, wherever we are, it is heaven itself. There are Christians practicing at this zendo. Some people might imagine that heaven is somewhere up in the sky and look up there to find it. But that is not how it is. As Jesus tells us, "the Kingdom of God is at hand." He was clearly aware of that reality. That's why he could also say, "The Kingdom of God is within you." Let us proceed now to the Verse.

*On the Verse:*

**On the tips of the hundred grasses, the spring without end.** This is speaking about how the one is the many. Although there are many, they are essentially one.

**Leaving things to his hands, he is intimate with the matter in uplifting it.** He has that timeless spring in the palm of his hands, free to use it. In seeking to explain it, we refer to it as essential nature. In this way I can use it freely. When I have something to do I stand up. When it's finished, I sit down again. When I'm in a hurry I run, when it's no longer urgent I walk. Completely free. This is what is meant by this line of the Verse. And now Shakyamuni Buddha comes on stage:

**The sixteen foot golden body, an aggregate of virtue.** This line is referring to Shakyamuni Buddha. Evidently the Buddha was quite an impressive figure. And his was a golden body. We can say that we all must become this golden body. To content ourselves with being white or yellow or brown, or whatever color we are, is not enough. To say that body is an "aggregate of virtue" means the collected virtue from the past which is now manifested in this present body.

**Accompanying the others in regal ease, he enters the world of red dust.** This expresses in poetic form how Shakyamuni travels with the others on pilgrimage.

**In the midst of the dust, he can be the master.** This does not mean that he is acting in a self-centered manner. It means that he acts as the master wherever he is. It is the essential world where there is no other one in the entire universe. He does not lose track of that world. All of you are engaged in various activities in everyday life. It is a world in which bad thoughts are seething. Although they may not all be bad, there are nevertheless thoughts of jealousy and of antagonism, or thoughts of becoming rich. It is in such a world that you are performing your work. It can't be helped since that it is the world of red dust. We are all living in the secular world and it is important that we do not lose ourselves in it.

**From the world beyond change comes naturally the guest.** This is referring to Sakadevendra (jap, Taishakuten). "Beyond change" means that the range of the propagation activities of Shakyamuni is found in the world of human beings. But from a world outside that, which cannot be seen with the eyes, comes Sakadevendra as the guest.

**Wherever he is, he follows his lot in life and is satisfied.** "Lot" means what we have; it's our share. It's a matter of being satisfied with your share. And that amount is determined by various karmic relations from the past. But that does not mean it remains

solid forever. Although these are things that occur with the generation of mind, mouth and will, as long as we are talking about the present moment, there is this share. That means we should never lose our spirit of aspiring to go further. For example, let's assume that I have a one-liter container here and a five-liter container here. Only one liter will fit in the one-liter container. This is its share. If you insert one liter in the one-liter container, you have to be satisfied with it. If you attempt to insert five liters in the one-liter container, it will not fit in and the rest will spill over. But if you attempt to insert one liter in the five-liter container, it will be no problem. Our essential nature has limitless capabilities. But we have to attribute a cause. It's a matter of giving a cause and having it come to manifestation in the phenomenal world. If you think of it, a one-liter container is a one-liter container. There is something strange and wonderful about this matter of a share or amount. It is said that the most frequent incidence of genius is found in the world of music or in the world of mathematics. There is an aspect here about which we can say nothing. It's like gold and silver. No matter how much you polish the silver, it will not become gold. Silver has its own "share," so to speak. But does that mean that silver is inferior to gold? Not necessarily. Regardless of the price silver sells for, there are things that can only be created with silver and gold will not do. In ancient times alchemists attempted to change silver into gold. It's a matter of trying this and that and taking time. In like manner, we have to be born again and again.

***Not disdain to be no match for the person of ability.***

In other words, as it is, is good. It means clearly realizing that, just as we are, we are the sole honored one in the entire universe. For example, there are some people with white skin and some with dark skin. There is no reason whatsoever for believing that, because we have skin of a certain color, we are somehow no good. "Ability" means our natural abilities as persons. The color of our skin is not an ability, it is our share. Even though you may have come to great enlightenment, when it comes to running the government, you will be no match for the prime minister. There is nothing we can do about this. It is just that we do not realize that it is a matter of following our lot in life and being satisfied. We do not realize that we are no match for the person of ability. In other words, we have not yet realized true peace of mind. In attempting to find peace of mind, we devote ourselves to practice. It is not that we are practicing in order to become a company president. Rather than becoming company president, it is a matter of attaining true happiness. The crane with his long legs is perfect as he is. The duck with his short legs is perfect as he is. I think that this will suffice for now.