

CASE 34

Fuketsu's Speck of Dust

By Yamada Kôun



Instruction:

An empty hand, bare fist – a thousand changes, ten thousand variations.
Even if one makes *being* out of *non-being*,
What could be done when the unreal is cast into the real?
Tell me: Is there a fundamental principle or not?

Case:

Fuketsu, giving instruction, said, "If one raises a speck of dust, the house and the nation prosper. If one does not raise a speck of dust, they perish."
Setchô held up his staff and said, "Is there anyone who lives and dies with this?"

Verse:

A white-headed man rises from his angling by the Wei River;
The two brothers on Mt. Shouyang are starved for their purity: Which is what?
It is just a speck of dust, with different transformations;
Fame and accomplishment: Neither will perish easily.

On the Instruction:

An empty hand, bare fist – a thousand changes, ten thousand variations. As I'm always saying, the essence of Buddhist teaching or Zen teaching is that the world which, from one perspective, is completely empty, is completely one with the phenomenal world that extends clearly before us. Actually there is nothing else. This koan is also presenting that same teaching. This is known alternately has "having" (u) and "not having" (mu). In the *Five Ranks* it is known as *shô* (essential) and *hen* (phenomenal). In the *Heart Sutra* it is known as form (kû) and emptiness (shiki). Most people know nothing of the world of emptiness; they only know the world of phenomena. It is quite difficult to realize that the world of phenomena is at the same time completely empty. No matter how ardently you pursue it philosophically, you

cannot realize it. You could say that, from the beginning, there has never been any way to realize it other than through the practice of Zen, where you realize it clearly in the kensho experience. However, as I am always saying, modern physics has pursued the nature of the world of matter to its ultimate and is about to become absorbed in the world of not a single thing. As I'm always saying, the day is coming when mathematicians and physicists will prove mathematically the fact stated as "form is no other than emptiness." It is only that they have not yet reached that point at the present time. But they are on a direct path toward realizing this fact one day. We should keep this fact in mind in viewing today's koan.

"An empty hand, bare fist" is speaking about the world of emptiness. When Dōgen Zenji returned from China he said, "I have returned with empty hands." The expression "bare fist" in today's Instruction evidently means "the empty sea of not a single thing" (kūkai-mubutsu). There is also the Zen expression "not a single thing, heart exposed naked and red" (*muichimotsu sekishin henpen*) in which the same character for "red" as in this line of the Instruction is used to express "bare" or "empty." But this does not mean a vacuum. There is also the expression *kyokū* to express emptiness, which tends to be used in the sense of a vacuum, although this is a great error. This emptiness cannot be grasped by our five senses. Even though you might be able to grasp air, this emptiness cannot be grasped. But this same emptiness possesses unlimited wondrous capabilities, according to physicists. Our heart-mind (kokoro) seems to be equal to emptiness. You might think this is a sort of vacuum, but that is not so. The one who is empty is seeing and hearing like this, and also thinking of things. This is quite amazing. Although it possesses unlimited capabilities, it is zero. Although I am zero, I possess limitless capabilities. This is what this first line means: An empty hand, bare fist – a thousand changes, ten thousand variations.

We also say, "precisely where there is nothing at all, there is the inexhaustible storehouse." This is the same as saying that where there is nothing there is everything. There is the danger of assuming that emptiness and phenomena are two different things that somehow equal each other. Just where there is nothing at all, there is everything.

Even if one makes being out of non-being,

What could be done when the unreal is cast into the real? These lines express how we tend in spite of ourselves to see emptiness and form as two different things. For example, there is the koan about Gutei Oshō: Whatever Gutei was asked about Zen, he stuck up a finger. This is the same as "when the unreal is cast into the real." By raising a finger, which is something in the phenomenal world, he completely reveals the essential world. This is what this line from the Instruction actually means in concrete terms. But we tend nonetheless to think of them as two different things. This is what is meant by this "what could be done" (ikan sen). And then comes the final line:

Tell me: Is there a fundamental principle or not? You could say that grasping this is our final goal. There is an old Japanese poem (uta):

"When I split open the cherry tree I find nothing, what do the seeds of the flowers say?"

Where do the flowers come from? What is the great source from which the flowers emerge? When you split open the cherry tree you find nothing. There is nothing to indicate where the flowers come from. Then where in the world does the life of the flowers come from? As I am always saying, if we consider things in terms of our body, I have a right hand and left hand, feet and a torso, and a head. This is my phenomenal form. And then there is the life in that body. No matter how you dissect my body you will never find anything like the essence of life. It will never appear. The same holds for the life of the flowers in the poem. No matter how powerful your microscope, you will never find that life. The lines about cutting open the cherry tree are like the science of anatomy. In Zen it's a matter of catching that life "alive" to speak. This is what this final line of the Instruction is talking about: Tell me: Is there a fundamental principle or not?

On the Case:

Fuketsu, giving instruction, said, "If one raises a speck of dust, the house and the nation prosper. If one does not raise a speck of dust, they perish." This koan also appears as Case 61 of the *Blue Cliff Record*. The first line about "raising a speck of dust" means recognizing that speck of dust, bringing it to the fore. And if you do so, "the house and the nation prosper." The nation could be understood as Japan or the U.S.

But if one does not recognize that speck of dust, the nation perishes. That's the literal meaning of the words, but what is this actually talking about? This statement can be looked at from several angles. Let's look at it first head on. To say that the nation prospers is referring to the entire phenomenal world. The question is: What is meant by the speck of dust that is raised? There are many possibilities of understanding this, but if you look at it head on, you can see this single grain of dust in the phenomenal world as the aspect of "having" (Japanese: *ari*). From that standpoint, all things in the phenomenal world come into being, they appear. If you do not raise a speck of dust, if you do not recognize that grain of dust, from that standpoint (although "standpoint" is a word I would rather not use) the entire phenomenal world disappears. What happens then? "There is not a speck of cloud obstructing the view." This is the world of not a single thing.

The phenomenal world extends out very clearly. But from another standpoint, there is not a single thing. Although there is not a single thing, the phenomenal world extends out clearly. Where does it come from? Do you recognize a speck of dust or not? In the *Heart Sutra* it says "form is just emptiness, emptiness is just form." In the *Five Ranks* it is *hen* and *shô*. *Shô* is the essential world, the world of not a single thing. *Hen* is the phenomenal world. Although we make a division here into two, they are finally what is expressed in the *Five Ranks* as *ken-chû-tô* (achieving the universal among the particular) in which all divisions are cleared away and you return to your original natural self (Japanese: *moto no mokuami*). To put it in more understandable terms, if you speak from the standpoint of "having" and there is a thought of "having," the entire universe appears. If the thought of "having" disappears, there is

not a single thing. Among the famous Zen texts is a book known as the *Gotō-Egen* (Wudeng Huiyuan: Compendium of Five Lamps) which describes the enlightenment experiences of the Zen patriarchs of old. This expression evidently comes from the 10th chapter of that work, although I have not had access to the original. There it appears as follows: “If a speck of dust is raised the country prospers and the old peasants frown.” If the country appears, then there will be laws, and the peasants will no longer be able to enjoy their freedom, so they’re not so happy about it. Then comes the second part:

“If the country perishes, the old peasants live in peace.” They will be happy and at peace. The Chinese have always hated to be tied up and deprived of their freedom. You could say such an expression has more of a Taoistic flavor than Buddhist. At any rate, there is this flavor of enjoying one’s freedom and life. If we take the same expression more from a Zen standpoint, we get what I mentioned before. If no grain of dust is raised, the country perishes. That is, there is nothing at all. It’s a question of whether you can freely distinguish between them in your life. If you ask me, this whole matter of the nation flourishing and perishing makes it all difficult. I want to say, “Throw away that grain of dust, extinguish that grain of dust! Then I’m ready to talk with you.” This is how it has to be when all is said and done. The truly free state of consciousness is the one expressed by the phrase “the old peasants live in peace.” The world of satori is the world of not a single thing. It’s a matter of clearly grasping this world where “not a speck of dust is raised.” But if you simply remain in that world of satori, it’s of no use. You’re just sitting there enjoying your satori. You have to come back into the ordinary world and bring what you have experienced to others. That is not an easy task. This is the world where the nation flourishes, the world of phenomena. As I mentioned, even satori must be discarded. And then there is just doing what you do with all that’s in you. Nevertheless, it’s essential to go through this process of coming to enlightenment and then forgetting that enlightenment. There’s a world of difference between a person who has gone through this process and someone who hasn’t.

In the version of this koan that appears in the *Blue Cliff Record* there is a second part:

Setchō raised his staff and said, “Are there any patchrobed monks who will live together and die together?” Don’t assume that Setchō was present at the time Fuketsu made his statement. He lived quite a long time after Fuketsu and probably said this after he had presented the koan about Fuketsu to his assembly. The staff is a stick used when going on pilgrimages. It has metal rings on the top that make a noise when you walk along. At any rate, Setchō took his staff and thrust it forward and posed the question above. What does this mean and what connection does it have with Fuketsu’s statement? This single staff presents the world of “form as emptiness, emptiness as form.” Setchō thrust out his staff. There is no separation into having and not having. He presents us with the fact itself. He is checking the monks in his assembly and asking them if they have clearly realized the world where having and not having, form and emptiness, are completely one. If you simply read the statement “form is emptiness,” you’re liable to think there are two things, form and emptiness,

that somehow equal each other. The original Chinese has the character “soku” which means “is no other than,” a phrase that could easily give rise to ideas of form somehow equaling emptiness. Actually, however, they are intrinsically one and the same. I would therefore like to remove that character “soku” and just say “form-emptiness, emptiness-form” (shiki-kû-kû-shiki). That’s the real fact. Setchō is asking if there is anyone who has realized this fact. That’s how this question has to be viewed.

On the Verse:

A white-headed man rises from his angling by the I-sui River.

The two brothers on Mt. Shouyang are starved for their purity: Which is what? These lines have their origin in the famous story about Lord Taigong and another story about the brothers Boyi and Shuqi. They are originally found in the ancient *Book of History* (Shiji). According to that book there was in former times the kingdom of Zhou. This was prior to the time of Confucius. Living in the country of Zhou was an outstanding person who later became King Wen. His original name was Xi Bo. At that time, they had yet to decide on the name Zhou for their country. According to the historical records, it was only when King Wen’s son King Wu became king that the country was known by that name of Zhou. Although there is no doubt that he created a kingdom, it was still not yet known by the name of Zhou. Later, however, King Wen became known as King Wen of Zhou, but not at the time he was ruling. At the time of the story he was a servant of Taigong, an outstanding person who originally came from a region known as Xibo. However, Taigong passed away. Prior to his passing, he evidently had said that, if a sage would come to this country, it would become an outstanding nation. Following Taigong’s death, Xibo went in search of that sage. He happened to see an old man with white hair fishing in the Wei River. It seemed to him that this was no ordinary old man, so he approached him and got into a discussion with him, discovering that the old man was indeed an outstanding person and a sage. He asked the old man if he would come to his country and aid him, since his former lord Taigong had predicted that, if a sage would come to the country, it would prosper. For this reason, the old man was referred to as “Taigong’s Hope.” This person known as Taigong’s Hope was a famous person and there have been many stories about him since olden times. He evidently was very fond of fishing. Interestingly enough, however, his fishing hook was not curved but straight! So instead of really fishing he was actually fond of simply letting his fishing line down. He felt that fishing with a curved hook would result in killing the fish, a violation of the commandment against killing. A most interesting man! So he was prevailed upon to come to the country of Zhou where he became the highest advisor known in Chinese as Da-shi (Daishi). King Wen’s son, an unruly child in his youth, succeeded him as King Wu. At that time, King Chou of Yin was a very violent ruler without virtue. King Wu defeated him and destroyed that country, thus creating the foundation for the 100-year rule of the kingdom of Zhou. This story is referred to here as an example of “the nation flourishing.”

The two brothers on Mt. Shouyang are starved for their purity: Which is

what? This story also has its origin in Chinese ancient history. The two brothers Boyi and Shuqi were the sons of Lord Guzhu. Guzhu was fond of the younger brother Shuqi and wanted to make him his successor, but he died before that. Shuqi said that it was only natural that his older brother should assume the throne and wanted to retire from the scene, but his brother told him how their father had wanted the younger brother to be the successor and that it was not right for him to do so. Since neither of the brothers wanted to assume the throne, they both left their homeland and went to King Wen of Zhou in order to become his vassals. But King Wen had already died and his son King Wu had succeeded to the throne. King Wu had attacked the kingdom of Yin to eliminate it. He wanted to do away with King Chou of Yin, to whom they were in the position of vassals. Hearing of this, the brothers Boyi and Shuqi criticized this action, demanding to know how a vassal could attack his master. They urged him to desist from doing so. The vassals in the service of King Wen thought the two brothers were upstarts and wanted to capture them and kill them. But then the advisor known as Taigong's Hope (see above) pleaded in their behalf, saying they were both outstanding persons whose lives should be spared. It was he who saved their lives. The two brothers gave up any plans to serve King Wen of Zhou and retired to the mountains, not wanting to be dependent on such a country. But they had to eat something. Nevertheless, they found themselves unable to eat the rice of Zhou and instead ate bracken in the mountains. However, someone asked them how they could eat bracken growing in the kingdom of Zhou, pointing out that, in doing so, they could not say they were no longer dependent on Zhou. The two brothers therefore decided to stop eating altogether and eventually starved to death. You could probably not find a nobler and more beautiful way of dying. That is why it is referred to in the Verse as "starved for their purity." This second line refers to the aspect of "the nation perishing." On the one hand, we have actions by which the nation flourishes, and on the other hand, actions whereby they reject the nation and die of starvation. This second part can be seen as representing the world of emptiness.

It is just a speck of dust, with different transformations;

Fame and accomplishment: Neither will perish easily. Taigong's Hope later became a lord and very illustrious in the historical records. This is the aspect of fame and accomplishment. The other aspect is the one represented by the brothers who died of starvation and never became famous. The one aspect is prospering and becoming a lord. The others died of starvation. "Where is the difference?" the verse asks us. It's a question of whether the single grain of dust is recognized or not. The two stories are referred to here to symbolize the two aspects.

Fame and accomplishment: Neither will perish easily. It means that both are indestructible: the accomplishment of Taigong's Hope and the fame of the two brothers. Both of them send out eternal light. If you ask me, as I said already up above, as long as there is that grain of dust, there are discussions about recognizing it or not. I want to say, "Throw away that speck of dust and then I'm ready to talk with you!" In the Verse to this koan as it appears in the *Blue Cliff Record*, Setchō says:

The old peasants may not unfurrow their brows.

This is the aspect of “the nation flourishing.” When the nation flourishes, the peasants are not happy.

Setchô continues:

But for now I hope that the nation establishes a sturdy foundation.

This seems to be the appearance of Taigong’s Hope, making stalwart efforts to cause the nation to flourish. Here’s the next line:

Crafty ministers, valiant generals—where are they now?

Where are all those ministers and generals who attempted to defend the nation? It’s like saying, “Upon searching for it, we find no traces” as Dôgen Zenji says in the *Shushôgi* (Meaning of Practice and Enlightenment). Everything has disappeared.

Here is the final line of Setchô’s Verse:

Ten thousand miles’ pure wind, only I know.

The freshness and purity of the aspect of “not raising a speck of dust” is compared to a fresh wind blowing ten thousand miles. Is it a spring wind or an autumn wind? “Only I know how to appreciate it,” says Setchô. This ten thousand miles’ pure wind, which results when all concepts and thoughts have been discarded, is only known to me, Setchô says. Please take the time to savor these lines.