

CASE 96

Kyūhō Does Not Acknowledge



By *Yamada Kōun*

Instruction:

Ungo does not rely upon spiritual relics, the pearls of Precepts;
Kyūhō does not appreciate expiring while sitting or standing,
Gyūtō does not need hundreds of birds to bring him flowers,
Ōbaku does not envy gliding, as if upon a cup, across the water.
Tell me, what are their special merits?

Case:

Kyūhō served Sekisō as his attendant. After Sekisō's passing, the assembly wanted to make their head monk the abbot of the temple. Kyūhō would not acknowledge him. He said, "Wait till I examine him. If he understands our late master's spirit and intention, I will serve him as I served our late master."

So he asked the head monk, "Our late master said,
'Have been totally ceased;
Have been totally extinguished;
[Have become a cool land of desolation;]
Have had only one awareness for ten thousand years;
Have become cold ashes and a withered tree;
[Have become a fragrant censer in an ancient shrine;]
Have become a vertical stripe of white silk.'

Tell me, what sort of matter did he clarify with this?" The head monk said, "He clarified the matter of absolute Oneness." Kyūhō said, "If so, you have not yet understood our late master's spirit." The head monk said, "Don't you acknowledge me? Pass me incense." He lit the incense and said, "If I had not understood our late master's spirit, I would not be able to pass away while the smoke of this incense rises." No sooner had he said this than he expired while sitting in zazen. Kyūhō caressed his back and said, "Dying while sitting or standing is not impossible. But you could not even dream of our late master's spirit."

Verse:

The school of Sekisō was intimately transmitted to Kyūhō.
Expiring in the fragrant smoke does not lead to the authentic stream.
The crane in the moon-lit nest creates a dream of one thousand years,

While the man in the snowy hut is deluded by the merit of the absolute Oneness. Cutting off all ten directions through sitting is still a miserable failure; Moving intimately one step forward would witness soaring dragons.

On the Instruction:

Ungo does not rely upon spiritual relics, the pearls of Precepts;

Spiritual relics (*shari*) and pearls of Precepts (*kaiju*) actually mean the same thing. The Japanese word *shari*, meaning spiritual relics, originally comes from the Sanskrit *sarira*. It can also be translated as “spiritual bones.” The same holds for the expression “pearls of Precepts.” A person of high virtue who has kept the Precepts is said to become like a pearl upon cremation after dying. It is as if the person’s mortal remains become like jewels. That is the case, at any rate, for a person who has accumulated high virtue. Shakyamuni Buddha was cremated after he died and it is even said that many such relics resulted. The spiritual bones of a person of high virtue who has kept the Buddhist precepts are known as *shari*. There is also the figure of *Sariputra*, who appears in the *Heart Sutra*.

Ungo built a grass hut on the flanks of Mt. Ungo and practiced there. Nearby lived an ascetic hermit practicing on his own and not communing with others much. One day, Ungo sent the hermit a short robe. The hermit said that he had already received a robe “from his mother” and sent it back. Then Ungo asked the hermit what robe he had worn before his mother was born. This is like the koan: What is your original face before your parents were born? The hermit was stumped for an answer. He later died and was cremated, upon which many relics emerged from the ashes, evidently because he was so upright. Word of this got to Ungo, who said, “It would have been far better if, at that time, he could have given an answer to my question. Such relics are of no use.” When someone brought a number of those relics to Ungo, he said “ten bushels.” This was reportedly the amount of relics that appeared when Shakyamuni Buddha was cremated. He is saying in effect, “Being able to supply an answer to my question is worth more than ten bushels of relics.” This is what is being referred to here in the first line of the Instruction.

Kyūhō does not appreciate expiring while sitting or standing,

Since this appears in the Main Case, I will talk about it at that time.

Gyūtō does not need hundreds of birds to bring him flowers,

Gyūtō was Gōzu Hōyu Zenji, who inherited the dharma of the Fourth Patriarch Dai Dōshin in a parallel line of succession. He was a truly outstanding individual who lived in the early years of the Tang Dynasty, sitting most earnestly. What I am now to relate took place before he had come to enlightenment. The birds would carry flowers in their beaks and drop them in front of where he was sitting in zazen until the entire area was covered with flowers. Dōshin (who later became the master of Gōzu), upon viewing a village in the distance, notice that a beautiful “spirit” or “chi” was arising from the mountains. Thinking there must be an outstanding person living there, he went to visit. There he noticed that the area around where the man was sitting was covered with flowers. When he inquired whether the man had any attendants, two tigers suddenly appeared. When Gōzu later became enlightened and truly great, the birds evidently stopped bringing flowers to him. You can assume that, if a person looks very august from the outside, he is not the real McCoy. The person who looks very distinguished on the train might not be much at all. The truly outstanding persons don’t look very special. This reminds me of a story I heard from Nakagawa Sōen Roshi of Ryūtakuji Temple, who recently passed away. It was in the time just after the war when the trains were very crowded. He was accompanying his master Yamamoto Genpō Roshi and they were both riding on the train, which was packed to the gills with passengers. Some people got in through the windows, but that would have been impossible for someone like me. When they finally managed to get a seat, Yamamoto Genpō Roshi scrunched up in the corner to take up as little room as possible. But Sōen-san, as he was called then, sat in stately dignity in Zazen. When they finally returned to the temple, Yamamoto Genpō Roshi took the younger monk sternly to

task. “What do you think you’re doing, putting on airs like that!”, he cried out. “When the train is so crowded like that, you should make every effort not to be an annoyance to others and take up as little room as possible. How unseemly to put on the airs of the august monk for all the world to see!” Someone who happened to be on hand at the time wrote about this occurrence in a Buddhist magazine or other publication. Reading this, I felt how true it was. The really outstanding monk is the one scrunched upon in the corner of the compartment. The monk wearing scarlet robes and giving out cries of “kaatzu!” is probably no great shakes. But if someone were to ask how it is for me, I wonder if I could give an answer. This is what this line of the Instruction is talking about.

Ôbaku does not envy gliding, as if upon a cup, across the water.

This also has a story behind it.

Ôbaku was the master of Rinzai. Dôgen Zenji evidently felt that Rinzai was no match for Ôbaku. One day, while Ôbaku was on pilgrimage, he happened to cross paths with a monk. The two monks eventually came to a river and Ôbaku was unable to cross the river. Some accounts say that the other monk glided across the water. Another account says that he took the sedge hat he was wearing and placed it on the water, riding on it to the other shore. He then told Ôbaku to hurry up and come to the other side. Seeing this, Ôbaku cried out in anger, “If I had known he was such a fellow, I would have broken his legs.” Why did he become angry? Hearing this, the other monk said in his praise, “How fitting of a dharma vessel of the Mahayana!” Ôbaku was a Zen practitioner of Mahayana Buddhism. The ability to walk across the water is a sort of mysterious power. In Buddhism this refers to six different extraordinary powers, such as seeing things or hearing things far away. But in Mahayana Buddhism, that is not the purpose of practice. As your powers of concentration develop, samadhi power will naturally develop. But just because you can walk across water doesn’t mean you can be of true aid to others. For example, one of the six divine powers allows you to fly away to faraway places. Books owned by Yasutani Roshi included the work entitled *Record of the Supernatural Powers of Takahashi Yûmyô Shônin* [Takahashi Yûmyô Shônin Jinhengi], which was written by an army colonel who lived with him. This person was evidently able to do things that no one else could do, having strongly developed such supernatural powers.

Rather than going alone, it is much better to bring many others along in a plane. No matter how strong your supernatural powers may be, you cannot save others with them. Saving all beings is the basis of Mahayana Buddhism. It’s a matter of realizing your own true nature and coming to fundamental peace of mind. At the same time, the method by which you attain peace is then taught to others to save all beings. This cannot be done if you are only thinking of your own salvation. That is the reason why Ôbaku was angry and thought the other monk was not worth his salt. This is expressed in this line from the Instruction: Ôbaku does not envy gliding, as if upon a cup, across the water.

I believe it was Jesus Christ who had the most strongly developed supernatural powers. There is no one who’s his match in that regard. But he did not just have such powers, he also had the outstanding power to save others. There is the story of how he walked across the water. But if that were all he was capable of, he would not be the object of worship and belief that he is today. You have to have the power to save others; otherwise it is not true religion. Mere supernatural powers are not enough.

Tell me, what are their special merits?

In other words, what are the special merits of a person who does not need such powers as described in the previous lines? This directs our attention to the Main Case.

On the Case:

Kyûhō served Sekisō as his attendant.

Sekisō was an outstanding master of the Soto School of Zen. Kyûhō was acting at that time as his attendant (jisha).

After Sekisō's passing, the assembly wanted to make their head monk

the abbot of the temple. Kyūhō would not acknowledge him. He said, "Wait till I examine him. If he understands our late master's spirit and intention, I will serve him as I served our late master."

In other words, if he truly understands the world of satori of our late master, I will also serve him as attendant, just like I did for the departed master.

So he asked the head monk, "Our late master said,
'Have been totally ceased;
Have been totally extinguished;
[Have become a cool land of desolation;]
Have had only one awareness for ten thousand years;
Have become cold ashes and a withered tree;
[Have become a fragrant censer in an ancient shrine;]
Have become a vertical stripe of white silk.'

The original text includes only five, but the additional two are presented here in parentheses. Those two are:

Have become a cool land of desolation.

This means a landscape in autumn, where all leaves have fallen and it is very cool.

Have become a fragrant censer in an ancient shrine.

The smoke from an incense burner is rising up from the ancient shrine. The five in the original text are examined individually in the dokusan room. This is based on the discretion of Harada Roshi, I imagine, but I personally can't help feeling it's a bit contrived.

At any rate, Kyūhō queried the senior monk about this. Then he continued:

"Tell me, what sort of matter did he clarify with this?"

The head monk said, "He clarified the matter of absolute Oneness."

The head monk says that the late master was clarifying the world of satori. One person criticized the monk for this answer, calling him a "board-carrying fellow" (tanpankan). Just like a person carrying a board on his shoulder, he can only see one side. The head monk felt that the master was clarifying the world of satori. But actually the world of satori is simultaneously the world of ordinary common sense. Although they are two, they are actually one. Seen from one side, it is the world of satori; seen from the other side it is the world of ordinary common sense. You cannot separate them from each other. They are completely one. To say the monk was a board-carrying fellow means that he only saw the aspect of enlightenment.

Kyūhō said, "If so, you have not yet understood our late master's spirit."

In other words, if you say such a thing, you do not really understand our departed master Sekisō's world of enlightenment.

The head monk said, "Don't you acknowledge me? Pass me incense." He lit the incense and said, "If I had not understood our late master's spirit, I would not be able to pass away while the smoke of this incense rises."

That means the monk is going to show how he can die while sitting.

No sooner had he said this than he expired while sitting in zazen.

If you have powers of concentration, such a thing is possible. But it has nothing to do with enlightenment. Although power of concentration is definitely necessary to realize satori, if we ask whether satori will always arise from such concentration of mind, the answer is no. As I have said many times already, if you are concentrating on something outside of you it will not be possible. A good example is archery. You might be familiar with the book "Zen in the Art of Archery" written by a German author. In archery the target of concentration is outside of you. If you practice with all your might, you can make unlimited progress and develop your powers. Your power of concentration will increase without end. But no enlightenment will arise from that. That's the major difference. All the traditional arts in Japan include the

character for “way” (dō) in their names, such as shodō (calligraphy), chadō (tea ceremony), kendō (swordsmanship), jūdō, etc. But just because you practice these various ways does not mean you will realize satori through them. Of course, it’s very important to develop concentration of mind and such persons, having developed such concentration, were they to practice under a qualified Zen master, turning their attention to something formless within, would no doubt be able to achieve realization relatively quickly. I give many of you the koan Mu to practice with. Mu has no shape or form. But if you concentrate completely on it, amazingly enough you can realize it.

As he promised, the head monk was able to die before the incense smoke was extinguished. He wanted to show that he understood the meaning of the former master. But that was not the case.

Kyūhō caressed his back and said, “Dying while sitting or standing is not impossible. But you could not even dream of our late master's spirit.”

Kyūhō felt so sorry for the monk.

There have been examples in Japan, too, of people dying while sitting in Zazen. Yamaoka Tesshū Koji was an attendant to the Emperor Meiji. He was also a master swordsman. He could hold his liquor, was very good looking and was so tall you wouldn’t have taken him for a Japanese. He died of stomach cancer. He composed a poem about his own illness in which he said that his heavy eating and drinking had not failed to have their effect. He practiced under Seijō Roshi at Ryūtakuji Temple in Mishima. He might have been a master swordsman, but he had to practice under a qualified Zen master to realize satori. He had Saturday off from his duties in the palace. He would leave very early and walk over the Hakone Mountains to reach Mishima on foot. He must have been very fast and sure-footed to do such a thing. One day in dokusan he was unable to pass the koan. When he was returning through a mountain path, he happened to glance up and see Mt. Fuji rearing up before him and suddenly realized. He quickly returned to the temple. Seijō Roshi, who was sure that he would come back, was already sitting on his cushions and had lit incense while waiting for him. In the Kaizando hall at Ryūtakuji Temple, there is a figure of Hakuin Zenji in the center of the altar and on the right side is a figure of Tōrei Zenji, while on the left side is a figure of Seijō Roshi. He looks very gentle but then I recall that it was such a gentle person who was able to handle such a man like Yamaoka Tesshū. But here is also a photograph of him showing that he was quite stern, so that Suzuki Sōchū Roshi said he was actually a severe master.

At any rate, Yamaoka Tesshū had his wife make a white robe for him, telling her that he would wear this robe when he died. One morning, he went to the bath and purified himself completely. He told his wife to bring the white robe. Hearing this, his wife was surprised, thinking the time had come for him to die. He put on the robe and sat up upright on the floor in zazen, after which he passed away. Duly impressed by his way of dying, one of his students, a talented artist, depicted him holding a fan and passing away in utmost dignity. As for dying while standing up, there is the case of Benkei in antiquity who is known for “The Standing Death of Benkei” (*Benkei no Tachi Ōjō*). During the Pacific War there was the case of Lieutenant Colonel Gorō Sugimoto, who died in China. It is said that he practiced Zen at Butsūji Temple in Hiroshima and was a master swordsman, who nevertheless was considered something of an eccentric by those around him. Evidently Kōno Sōkan Roshi, the master with whom I first practiced, also practiced at that same temple in Hiroshima. When he would see Lieutenant Colonel Sugimoto on the street he would acknowledge him with a nod but would not speak with him evidently. Lieutenant Colonel Sugimoto died in battle in central China. It is said that he died while standing up supported by his sword and facing in the direction of the Emperor. What a wonderful way to die. At any rate, there are such examples of people dying that way. This is the result of the power of samadhi concentration, of concentration of spirit. In the case of Yamaoka Tesshū and Lieutenant Colonel Sugimoto, both men had also realized enlightenment, so it was not mere concentration power alone. But even if you have not realized enlightenment, such feats are possible with the aid of Samadhi power or *yoriki*. But to

repeat the final words of Kyūhō in today's case: "Dying while sitting or standing is not impossible. But you could not even dream of our late master's spirit."

On the Verse:

The school of Sekisō was intimately transmitted to Kyūhō.

This does not mean that Sekisō founded his own school of Zen. Nevertheless the Zen of Sekisō was intimately transmitted to Kyūhō. That means that Kyūhō received *inka* or the seal of transmission from Sekisō.

Expiring in the fragrant smoke does not lead to the authentic stream.

Just being able to pass away before the incense smoke dies away like the monk in the koan is not authentic Zen. The authentic Zen is found in the experience of enlightenment. Even though it might be possible to die sitting or standing up thanks to the powers of concentration, it would be difficult to refer to that as the authentic stream of Zen.

The crane in the moon-lit nest creates a dream of one thousand years,

The crane builds its nest at the top of a pine tree on a moonlit night and stands upright at the top of the tree. This is "the matter of absolute Oneness" referred to by the monk. It is a symbol for the world of satori. The "dream of one thousand years" refers to dwelling in the world of satori. The crane standing on one leg at the top of a pine tree on a moonlit night is a symbol for the world of satori.

While the man in the snowy hut is deluded by the merit of the absolute Oneness.

The "snowy hut" is a symbol for the world of one color, the world of Oneness. To say that he is deluded by the merit of absolute Oneness means that he mistakenly believes that reaching satori is enough. There is the saying "the season of dying the Great Death" (daishi ichiban no jizetsu). In that world of satori, there are no sentient beings to save, even though you might want to. If you remain in that world of Oneness, no religious activities are possible. If you wish to perform the religious activities of saving all beings, you must descend from that high place and return to the ordinary position. It is only then that you become a true Zen person. It is then that you become a religious person who can save others.

Cutting off all ten directions through sitting is still a miserable failure;

To "cut off all ten directions" means to reach the place where there is not a single thing. But the verse says that even reaching that place is "still a miserable failure." There is an old story behind this. An ancient Chinese legend says that, if a fish succeeds in swimming upstream, it will be turned into a dragon. At first it only has the shape of a dragon. But then lightning strikes and its fishtail is burned off, upon which it becomes a real dragon that ascends into heaven. The "miserable failure" literally means to bump your head. If you bump your head you cannot become a dragon. Even though you may have realized the world of emptiness, if you remain attached to that world, it is just like a fish that bumps its head and fails to become a dragon. If you remain forever in that world of nothingness, you can never become a dragon. You will remain unable to gain authentic enlightenment.

Moving intimately one step forward would witness soaring dragons.

This refers to taking a step out of that world of nothingness. Only then can you become a dragon. Recall the text to Case 46 of the *Gateless Gate*:

Another eminent master of old said, "Even though one who is sitting on the top of a hundred-foot pole has entered realization, it is not yet real. He must step forward from the top of the pole and manifest his whole body throughout the world in ten directions." The eminent master referred to here is Chōsha Keishin Zenji, a truly fearful master. Who was also known as Shin Daichū or Shin the Tiger. The one-hundred foot pole is the world of satori. It means sitting in that world of satori, where there is not a single thing. You remain unable to get out of that world. But as long as you are still stuck there, it is not true realization. You have to take a step out of that world. You have to take a step out of that world of emptiness and "manifest the whole body throughout the world in the ten directions." True satori means realizing that

you are one with the entire universe. This is saying the same thing as in the final line in today's Verse. I imagine you have the general gist of what I am saying. And now it's a matter of realizing and savoring it for yourself. In other words, just the aspect of emptiness is not enough. There are many levels to satori. Although it cannot be seen, you can nevertheless create levels. This is what is meant by the verse in today's case where it talks about:

Have been totally ceased;

Have been totally extinguished, etc.

He has made a division into five or seven steps according to his own realization. If I give examples in this way, we might have ideas in our head. But this means the state where all ideas have been eliminated and where it is just "Good morning," for example.

Some of my students ask me not to tell them the answers in dokusan, they do not want me to tell them anything. And then I feel that perhaps I **DO** say too much in dokusan. In one sense, it is precisely these persons who tell me not tell them anything in dokusan who are truly outstanding. They have the true spirit of wanting to definitely do it on their own. There may be persons who simply stand on the sides and listen in silence.