

CASE 16

Mayoku Shakes His Staff

By Yamada Kōun



Instruction:

To point at a deer and make it a horse, to take a clump of earth in your hand and turn it into gold. To raise wind and thunder from the tip of your tongue, to hide a bloodstained sword between your eyebrows. To discern winning or losing from your seat, to check for death or life from where you stand. Just say. What sort of samadhi is this?

Case:

Mayoku, with his ring-staff in hand, came to Shōkei. He circled around Shōkei's dais three times, shook the ring-staff and stood there bolt upright. Shōkei said, "Right, right!"

Mayoku then came to Nansen. He circled Nansen's dais three times, shook the ring-staff and stood there bolt upright. Nansen said, "Not right, not right!"

Then Mayoku said, "Master Shōkei said, 'Right, right!' Why, Master, do you say, 'Not right, not right!'" Nansen said, "With Shōkei it is right, but with you it is not right. This is nothing but a whirling of the wind. In the end, it will perish."

Verse:

Right and not right.
Look out well for the trap.
It looks like holding down, it looks like uplifting.
Difficult older brother, difficult younger brother.
In releasing, he already looks for the right moment.
In stealing, what is there special for me?
In shaking the metal rings once, he is the sole object.
In circling the dais three times, he carelessly played.
The confused monks' assembly gives birth to right and wrong.
Thinking they see a spirit when standing in front of a skeleton.

On the Instruction:

Since we have no zazenkai or sesshin here during February, we took the opportunity to go the Philippines and hold a sesshin there. As has been reported in the *Awakening Gong* (Kyōshō), the sesshin was held in Tacloban, a town in North Leyte, which was the scene of a major battle between American and Japanese forces during the Second World War. Located about 20 minutes away from the center of town is the locality of Pao. There, on a slight rise, is a retreat house that was evidently built by Spanish missionaries. This was the site of our five-day sesshin. There's much to say about that sesshin and later we'll be showing the pictures taken by Mr. Tonoike. Some 15 persons, both Japanese and non-Japanese, traveled from Japan to the Philippines to participate in that sesshin. The Manila San-Un Zendo, as it is called, under the direction of Sr. Elaine MacInnes, has developed into a fine center, with many fine persons regularly practicing there. They'll be time to speak more about that Zen group and the sesshin at tea after the zazenkai today. Let us proceed now to today's koan.

The text of today's koan also forms the Main Case of Case 31 of the *Blue Cliff Record*. That other version includes the short critical comments of Setchō Zenji, in which he interjects "Wrong, wrong!" after each comment from the various masters. That is lacking in today's version in the *Book of Serenity*.

To point at a deer and make it a horse, to take a clump of earth in your hand and turn it into gold. What is this talking about? The Instruction is concentrating on the skillful activity of Zen masters instructing their students (jap, *saryaku*). Since this is of course speaking about persons who have clearly grasped the world of satori, we have statements like the first one in the Instruction about pointing at a deer and making it a horse or taking dirt and turning it into gold. Seen from the world of ordinary common sense, it seems to be speaking nonsense. But the Instruction tells us that such things are child's play in the hands of an accomplished Zen person. Upon reading Yasutani Roshi's teisho on this koan, I discovered that there is a story behind this line of pointing at a deer and making it a horse.

In ancient times, during the reign of the Second Emperor of the Ch'in (jap, Shin) Dynasty, a man named Shōko was acting as Prime Minister. A very influential person, he wanted to cause an insurrection and take power himself. He hit upon the idea of testing how many people were devoted to him. He made the Emperor a gift of a deer and said it was a horse. The Emperor countered that it was not a horse, but a deer, but Shōko maintained it was a horse and told the Emperor he should ask the other persons who were present. Fearing the power of Shōko, there were some who said it was a deer, but also quite a few who said it was a horse. In the end, the Emperor himself didn't know any more if it was a deer or a horse, and was made a fool of. The Japanese word for "fool" is *baka*, a compound composed of the Chinese characters for horse and deer. A fool, then, to follow this etymology, is someone who cannot distinguish between a deer and a horse.

In the essential world, however, there are no names. From that vantage point, you can give it any name you like. That brings to mind another koan text that is Case 68 of the *Blue Cliff Record*.

Kyōzan asked Sanshō, "What is your name?" Sanshō said, "Ejaku." Kyōzan said, "Ejaku, that's me." Sanshō said, "My name is Enen." Kyōzan laughed loudly.

This is dealing with the same thing. From the essential standpoint, it doesn't matter what name you give to something. Since it is the world of emptiness, you're free to call it a deer or a horse. The Instruction doesn't say it that bluntly, but that is what is involved. As we shall see in the Main Case, one of the masters said, "right, right", and the other one said, "not right, not right." The Instruction has those exchanges in the Main Case in mind in making these statements. The same holds for taking a clump of earth and turning it into gold. The Instruction to the same case as it appears in Case 31 of the *Blue Cliff Record* contains the following passage:

When you release it, even a piece of rubble emits light. When you grasp it, even real gold loses its color.

Viewing things from that standpoint, it is not strange to speak about taking dirt and turning it into gold. If we simply see the world of phenomena, then gold is gold and dirt is dirt, and never the twain shall meet. But, lo and behold, each single phenomenon, each tree, each blade of grass is the essential world itself. We might still believe there's something like a separate essential world. Take this stick in my hand, for example. This is actually the complete manifestation of the essential world. The same holds for sticking up a single finger. This is the essential world itself. From that standpoint, that which appears to be dirt in the phenomenal world is the complete manifestation of the essential world. Stating it in other terms, we can say that it is Buddha-nature itself. That makes it possible to say that you can take a clump of dirt and turn it into gold. Let us proceed.

To raise wind and thunder from the tip of your tongue, to hide a bloodstained sword between your eyebrows. This means having the ability to pulverize all concepts with a single word, much like raising wind and thunder.

The section about the bloodstained sword between your eyebrows means the ability to use “the sword that kills” and the “sword that gives life” freely in saving others. He knows at a glance whether to use the sword that kills to cut off all delusions or to use the sword that gives life to produce the true life of satori. That sword is found between his eyebrows. A well-known Zen saying in Japan says:

A single sword leans on heaven and is cold.

This is talking about the essential world. You could also say “a single sword leans on his eyebrows and is cold.”

To discern winning or losing from your seat, to check for death or life from where you stand. Without doing anything he can discern at a glance whether this is a winning or losing situation. In other words, he can discern immediately the Zen understanding of the person before him, whether or not he is master of any situation. Whether sitting or standing, he knows at a glance whether the student has resolved the problem of life-and-death or not, whether he or she has died the great death and gained the great life. Only a true Zen adept can do this. Unless the teacher's own Zen eye is clear this will not be possible. Otherwise he could mistakenly confirm a bogus experience as authentic. This is a matter of primary concern, especially for those in the position of leading others in Zen practice. They have to decide whether to confirm an experience as kensho or not. There are also cases of confirming an experience while aware that the person still has a way to go in understanding, for example when the person is already advanced in years. Or the teacher might decide to confirm an experience in the expectation of pulling in the reins and acting more strictly in ensuing koan study. But it certainly would not do to act this way in every case. Once again, to confirm an experience while aware of the student's lack of understanding is one thing. But to do so because you yourself are not aware of that lack of understanding is quite another! When I check some persons who have been confirmed by other teachers, I find their understanding is mistaken. This is the worst case of all. And then there are even cases where the student has come to an authentic experience and the teacher is not aware of it. In determining whether a student has come to a true kensho experience or not, the teacher can only rely on his or her own experience. If the experience of the teacher is not clear, his or her judgment of other's experiences will also be unclear. Those acting in the role of the teacher of others in practice (and I of course include myself in this discussion) must make continuous and constant efforts to clarify and sharpen their own Zen understanding, to polish their own Zen eye, so to speak. You must polish your own understanding so that you yourself are free to act as is described in this Instruction. Both the Instruction and the ensuing Main Case deal with two main matters. The first is “killing” in the sense of killing all concepts, and the second is “giving life” in the sense of awakening to the true life of our true nature. Both of these aspects must be present in

authentic Zen training. Recall once again the words from the Instruction to this case as found in the *Blue Cliff Record*.

When you release it, even a piece of rubble emits light. When you grip it, even real gold loses its color.

Release means to give life. Grip means to take everything away. And then “even real gold loses its color.” Another way of expressing it is that “not a single grain of dust is raised.” This is the true world. There is not the slightest trace of logical thought or meaning in that world. Then there is the saying:

“Within the gate of Buddhist matters, not a single thing is discarded” (jap, *butsujimonchū ippō wo sutezu*).

This is the aspect of giving life. Whether leading others in Zen practice or raising up children in the family, these two aspects of “killing” and “giving life” are both indispensable. It won’t do to show anger all the time; you also have to “give life” in the sense of praising when praise is due. Both Zen teachers and parents must develop the ability to apply both aspects skillfully and freely. Otherwise, it won’t be possible to rear up either good Zen students or good children. I get the impression that parents nowadays are a little too soft on their children, failing to scold them when necessary. You have to have the natural authority to tell children in no uncertain terms when they’ve done something wrong. When I read the newspaper these days, I have the impression that children nowadays are allowed to do pretty much what they please. It seems that a standard of judging what is right and wrong is lacking. When those children graduate from high school and go on to college, they think they’re quite something. Most mothers today haven’t gone to college like their children and their children tend to get the better of them in arguments. Parents in such situations tend to give in readily to the demands of those children. But really outstanding mothers are not like that, regardless of their educational background. A good example is the mother of former Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka. Although he’s involved in questionable affairs these days, his mother seems to have been quite a person. Even Tanaka himself says he has only the deepest respect for his mother, though she has no education worth speaking of. Tanaka can only nod in agreement when she speaks with natural authority. This has nothing to do with how much book-learning one has acquired. It’s her authority as a human being that counts. This aspect of natural authority seems to be gradually disappearing. If you are to be a true Zen personage, the type of power I am speaking about must be in evidence.

Just say. What sort of samadhi is this? “Samadhi” here means the utmost concentration of mind. The author asks what sort of samadhi power can result in such a case? What sort of samadhi concentration is required to produce such Zen activity and power? An example will now be given.

On the Case:

Mayoku, with his ring-staff in hand, came to Shōkei. He circled around Shōkei's dais three times, shook the ring-staff and stood there bolt upright. Mayoku Hôtetsu Zenji was later to become an outstanding Zen master in his own right. But what was his state of consciousness at the time of this exchange? Commentators are divided in their opinion about that. He himself was convinced of the clarity of his own experience. He seems to be still glittering with the sheen of his satori experience. He evidently paid a visit on Shōkei in the course of his pilgrimages (jap, *angya*) throughout the land to find outstanding Zen masters. He has a staff in his hand as he walks the length and breadth of China, engaging in Zen mondo or exchanges if he happens upon outstanding Zen adepts in order to polish and deepen his own Zen understanding. The staff has metal rings on top that jingle as he walks along. With his staff in his hand he comes to Shōkei and finds him sitting there. It was common courtesy in the Zen world of that time on such occasions to circle around the seat of the master three times in a clockwise direction and then wait for him to speak. His spirits rise to the skies as he stand there, not deigning to approach from the side, but standing bolt upright in front of Shōkei. He shakes his staff and stands there in silence, as if to say, “How

will you treat me?" What is this? Needless to add, this is the state of "only one in the entire universe" or "under heaven and on the earth, I alone am honored." He is presenting his own enlightened state of consciousness. This is not bad at all. And so Shōkei says, "Right, right." Yes, that's good. Shōkei was a dharma descendant of Baso, although records are limited to two or three exchanges. He differed from Baso in being of a warm disposition and not given to strange behavior. This element of his personality appears in the present koan. He just says, "Right, right." He gives his approval to Mayoku's way of presenting the dharma. As I mentioned previously, the version of this koan that appears in the *Blue Cliff Record* includes the short critical comments of Setchō Zenji in which he shouts "Wrong!" like a heckler in the audience in response to Shōkei's "Right, right." We can ask why Setchō makes such a comment, but the fact is that there are no such comments in this version in the *Book of Equanimity*. I personally feel the version in the *Blue Cliff Record* with Setchō's critical comments is more interesting. There are different ways of interpreting those comments, and I will deal with that later.

Evidently Mayoku felt a little pleased with himself after receiving these words of approval from Shōkei. He then went to Nansen.

Mayoku then came to Nansen. He circled Nansen's dais three times, shook the ring-staff and stood there bolt upright. Nansen said, "Not right, not right!" How very like Nansen, the one who killed the cat in another famous koan, to refrain from immediately giving his approval! Here, once again, in the version found in the *Blue Cliff Record*, Setchō engages in heckling and says "Wrong!" What does this comment mean? If you ask me, remember that Shōkei first said "right, right." This is the standpoint of giving life. It is not wrong. Although I don't have time here to go into details, if we were to examine this reply in light of the *Five Ranks of Hen and Shō* of Master Tōzan, it could be considered as *hENCHŪSHŌ* or the essential within the phenomenal. "Right, right." That's certainly OK and not mistaken. But it still remains only half. As I'm always saying, to allow everything to live, we must not forget the other aspect of killing everything or denying everything. Thus, Sanshō's reply of "right, right" is only half. Realizing this, Setchō gives his comment of "Wrong!" Turning again to the *Five Ranks*, I see this as representing the rank of *kenchūtō*. When Mayoku does the same thing before Nansen, Nansen says "not right, not right." He does not accept anything. I see this as the level of *shōchūrai* in the *Five Ranks*. This is the state where "not a grain of dust is raised," where there is "not a speck of cloud obscuring the view." He rejects everything from that standpoint. It would appear that Nansen, killer of the cat, liked cutting. Here he cuts away everything with his reply of "not right, not right." Setchō once again says, "Wrong," perhaps in the sense that it is only half of the whole.

Mayoku then lashes out at Nansen.

Then Mayoku said, "Master Shōkei said, 'Right, right!' Why, Master, do you say, 'Not right, not right!'" Nansen said, "With Shōkei it is right, but with you it is not right. This is nothing but a whirling of the wind. In the end, it will perish." There are different ways of viewing this part. In perusing Yasutani Roshi's teisho on this koan, I find a passage where he says that Mayoku is attempting to shake up Nansen to see how he will react. That's certainly one way of viewing it. I myself can't help feeling that he was revealing his true colors at this point, although I can't totally rule out that he might have been trying to shake up Nansen. Nevertheless, I can't help feeling that, at this point, he got caught up in dualistic ideas of "right" and "not right," showing his true colors.

Nansen tells him, "With Shōkei it is right, but with you it is not right." If Mayoku was really worth his salt, he would have realized that he had met his match with Nansen and retired from battle. But that is not reported on here and we don't know how he reacted. What about Nansen's final statement?

"This is nothing but a whirling of the wind. In the end, it will perish." We might expect Nansen, after saying that "with you it is not right," to explain why Mayoku is wrong. But instead, he offers this final comment. He is saying, in effect: Your act of circling

the dais three times and shaking your staff and standing bold upright is nothing but the whirling of the wind. This can be taken as a synonym for all movement and comes originally from Indian philosophy. All hard things among the elements are known as earth. All moist things are known as water. All hot things are considered to be fire. And all movement is considered to be wind. The ancients believed that all phenomena were composed of these four elements of earth, wind, water and fire. Nansen tells Mayoku that all his movements are the actions of the body. All those actions of the body will disappear at some point. This is how I have viewed this final statement and still feel so today. On reading Yasutani Roshi's teisho, however, I find that Harada Roshi believed that he had been mistaken in his understanding of this passage for a long time. He originally believed it meant what I just said, in other words, that it has to do with the body and the actions of the body. But now he believes that the power of the wind means moving between right and not right. That would mean Nansen is saying that such wavering between right and not right will eventually perish. This is how an evolution in Harada Roshi's understanding of the koan is described in Yasutani Roshi's teisho. Nonetheless, I can't quite agree with that later view, and feel my interpretation of the body and the movement of the body to be correct. It is the body that shakes the staff, stands stock-still and presents itself as the only one in the whole universe, the world of complete enlightenment. It is precisely because there is a body that this can be done. Nansen is telling him not to depend on that body, since that body will decompose and disappear some day. This is quite a formidable koan.

This case and its contents call to mind the koan about *Gutei's Finger in the Gateless Gate*. In Mayoku's case, he circles the dais three times, shakes his staff and stands stock-still. If it were Gutei, he would no doubt have held up a finger. A possible response is "right, right." Mayoku then goes to Nansen and does the same thing as before. This time it is "not right, not right." This corresponds to Gutei's cutting off the finger of the boy acolyte who imitates his raising a finger, although we do not know for certain if he did such a thing. At any rate, in the koan the boy ran away screaming in pain and Gutei called to him. When the boy turned around, Gutei suddenly raised a finger. On attempting to raise his own finger, the boy realized he had none and came to enlightenment. What should we do? I think it's important to see that they are both presenting the same thing. This comment of Nansen's (in the end, it will perish) is said in reference to the body. He is saying that if we depend on the body and think that is satori, we are still mistaken. I feel no objections to viewing this statement in this way.

This is quite an interesting koan. He shakes his staff and stands bolt upright as if saying, "I am alone in the entire universe." He has cut off all words, producing **the ??mind-life that never perishes?. (I'm not sure where this expression comes from, Paul)**

This reminds me of another Zen exchange that involves the Soto monk Morita Goyū Zenji, an outstanding figure of the early modern period in Japan. One day he engaged in dharma combat (*hossen*) in which he fielded questions from several other monks. In response to any question that was asked, he simply said "mokkaha," which means "it cannot be grasped." Our true self cannot be grasped. So his reply to any question he was asked was simply *mokkaha*. I remember hearing this story when I was younger. His practice of answering any question with "mokkaha" is no different from Gutei who stuck up a finger in response to any question he was asked without exhausting its function his entire life. If I had been present at that time (although I don't know if I would have the gumption to really say it), I can imagine suddenly going to him and saying, "I have grasped it in this way!" while grasping him by his lapels. What would he have said in response? Most probably, he would have said, "Mokkaha!" Then I would say "grasping in this way, completely free." But this is just something I thought up in my head. (Roshi laughs).

On the Verse:

Right and not right.

Look out well for the trap. Some say “right,” and some say “not right.” That’s just like the palm and back of your hand. Seen from one side, it is “right,” and seen from the other side, it is “wrong.” The poet is warning us not to fall into the trap of “wrong” and “right.”

It looks like holding down, it looks like uplifting. “Holding down” is “not right, not right.” He says it “looks like holding down,” which means it is not the authentic thing. “Uplifting” is “right, right.” They both look like the real thing, but we do not know his true intention. Neither of them is the real thing; they are both only half of the whole. Neither Shōkei nor Nansen can be excused for not knowing that. That’s the reason for saying that “it looks like” holding down or uplifting.

Difficult older brother, difficult younger brother. Both are OK as they are, in saying “right” or in saying “not right.” Both of them are quite something, the poet says.

In releasing, he already looks for the right moment. “Releasing” means allowing or giving approval, such as “right, right.” To “look for the right moment” means that he does not simply give his approval, but looks for precisely the right moment to say “right, right.”

In stealing, what is there special for me? Although he stole everything away with “not right, not right,” it was nothing special. It was just something done on the spur of the moment.

In shaking the metal rings once, he is the sole object.

This is heaping considerable praise on Mayoku. In shaking his staff and standing bolt upright, he is alone in the entire universe. This is known also as “walls ten-thousand feet high,” in the sense of lofty and unapproachable. The verse seems to be heaping praise on Mayoku.

In circling the dais three times, he carelessly played. The seats in old China had a rope border on them. Once again, this line in the verse seems to rating Mayoku quite highly, saying that he is enjoying the samadhi of innocent delight.

The confused monks’ assembly gives birth to right and wrong. The monks are arguing about who was right with his answer, maintaining that Shōkei was only giving half or that Nansen was only giving half. In that sense, you could say that everything I have said up to now in this teisho is giving birth to right and wrong!

Thinking they see a spirit when standing in front of a skeleton. Even if they see a skeleton of a person who has been dead for one or two hundred years, they imagine it is a spirit and are frightened. This is like us, who think this and that, coming up with all sorts of concepts where there is actually nothing at all. The verse tells us that such concepts have no real substance. Today’s koan might seem simple at first glance, but when you start examining it you see that there is much to savor and appreciate. I find it to be quite an interesting koan.