

CASE 26

Kyōzan Points to Snow



By Yamada Kōun

Instruction:

Ice and frost are one color; snow and moon mingle their light.
It freezes the Dharma-body to death, and ruins Gyoho¹ through
purity.

Is there anyone who wants to extol such a thing or not?

Case:

Kyōzan pointed to the snow lion² and said, “Is there any³ that goes
beyond this color?”

Unmon said⁴, “I would have pushed it over for him at once.”

Setchō said⁵, “He only knows how to push it over, but he doesn't
know how to help it up.”

Verse:

A knocking-down, a setting-up: the snow lion in the garden.
Mindful about trespasses, [yet] he embraces kindness;
Brave in actions, they see righteousness.
The pure light shining into the eyes, one loses the way home;
Turning from clarity, one falls into the state.
Patch-robed monks never have anything to rely upon after all;
Born together, dying together – how can one say who is here and who is
there?
The warm tidings opening the plum buds, the spring comes to cold
branches;
The chilly wind felling the leaves, the autumn purifies the river water.

¹ A person in the land of So Kingdom (4th /3rd Century BCE), who admonished the extremely pure Kutsugen for realistic flexibility. Cf. Verse to Case 12.

² Probably a lion made of snow or a stone lion covered with snow.

³ I.e., “anyone” or “anything.”

⁴ I.e., later.

⁵ I.e., hearing of this.

On the Instruction:

Ice and frost are one color; snow and moon mingle their light.
It freezes the Dharma-body to death, and ruins Gyoho through
purity.

Is there anyone who wants to extol such a thing or not? In Zen practice the basic rules have been determined. As I'm always saying, all the koans are talking about the same thing. This world in which we live is the world that we can grasp with our senses, the world we can see with our eyes or smell with our nose. This is known as the objective world or the phenomenal world, and most people are only familiar with that world. But that's not the only world. People do not know that the aspect of the phenomena we can see and hear is completely empty in content. It is void. The first person to discover this fact was Shakyamuni Buddha. He sat in zazen for six years and realized great enlightenment. He realized that there is not only the world we can see with our eyes or hear with our ears, but that this is simultaneously void. To realize that this is empty is also to know that, whatever happens in the phenomenal world, in essence there is not the slightest movement. It is a matter of realizing this, which then leads to peace of mind. Most people are afraid of dying, and become worried if they get seriously ill. From the aspect of the essential, where there is not a single thing, even if you get sick there is no danger to our life. To say that it is not life-threatening means that we do not die. It is in seeing things from this perspective that illustrious monks have often said there is no birth and not death. They say, "There is no life and death with me." It is a matter of clearly realizing that we do not die. I would like somehow for all of you to clearly realize this world. It is for this reason that I have people practice with the koan MU or practice *shikantaza*. And if you practice fervently, you will suddenly realize this world where there is not one thing. This is not just a concept of something you imagine in your head. It is not something you obtain as a result of philosophical investigation. You suddenly realize. This is known as kensho or satori. The world you grasp in that moment is the world of emptiness, the world of not one thing. This realization is a cause for great and indescribable joy. But having realized it, we are liable to cling to it. After all, since all the things that plagued you and caused suffering up to then are suddenly gone, it's natural to feel very happy. You feel happy because you have obtained true freedom. But it won't do to simply remain indefinitely in the world of emptiness. You may be all right, but it is of no help to others. We might say that the Hinayana approach is one that says it is enough if you are saved. But there is still this separation of "I and the others." That is not Buddhism in the true sense. Here we find the difference between the large vehicle (Mahayana) and the

smaller vehicle (Hinayana). The larger vehicle means that the others must also be saved. It might be a fad these days to imagine that it is enough to save yourself, but that will not do. We're talking here in terms of religion. From the standpoint of the Greater Vehicle, it is of no value simply to enjoy your peace of mind in the world of enlightenment. You must proceed further and break through that state. That means returning to everyday life and society. You must become one with people suffering in the world and do whatever you can to bring them happiness. It is only when efforts of this sort take place that we can speak in terms of religion. This is what is meant by saving all beings. You could say that every koan is talking about this same matter. The same holds for today's koan. This koan concerns Kyōzan. The founders of the so-called Igyō School of Zen were Isan and Kyōzan. Kyōzan was Isan's disciple, and his state of enlightened consciousness was in total harmony with that of his master. This harmony led to the creation of the so-called Igyō School in Zen. The two masters occasionally appear in the Zen koans and records.

Also appearing in today's koan is Unmon, who is revered as the patriarch of the Unmon School. He, too, was a most outstanding Zen personage. And the third person to appear in the koan is Setchō Chikan Zenji. Let us look at the Instruction.

Ice and frost are one color; snow and moon mingle their light. Ice and frost are both water, so they have the same color. This is a reference to the essential world, the world of emptiness, which is known here as "one color." The world of satori is sometimes known as "highest single color" (jap, kōjō-issiki). "Highest" is said in terms of the highest level of satori. "Single color" expresses how all things are the same. In the phenomenal world, each phenomenon is separate and different, but from the aspect of the essential all are the same. This aspect cannot be understood or appreciated unless one practices zazen fervently and has an enlightenment experience. Although the world of phenomena clearly exists before our eyes, seen from another perspective, the world of emptiness extends out.

"Snow and moon" means that there is nothing but snow before us and the moonlight shines on the snow. This is also an expression of the single color white. It is an expression of the world of satori, the world of not one thing. Then we come to the next line:

It freezes the Dharma-body to death. The Dharma-body is the pure dharma-body, also known as Vairocana Buddha. You could understand it as the essence of the universe. In more understandable terms, we can call it the true self or the true fact. To say "it freezes the Dharma-body" to death means that it is incapable of movement, which also means that there is no movement to begin with. If we examine this in terms of the mathematical fraction I am always citing, we can represent the phenomenal world with the Greek letter alpha (α) as the numerator of the fraction. We usually assume that there is nothing other than this world of alpha, but when we

realize satori, we realize the denominator of the fraction, which is zero and infinite. That means every phenomenon is zero and infinite. To say that it is zero means that it cannot be grasped with our five senses, no matter how we try. But it also means that it possesses or harbors limitless capabilities or potential. Consider your own mind. Your mind has no shape or form, and in that sense it is zero or void. You cannot grasp it with your senses; you cannot produce it for examination. But if we ask if it exists or not, we have to admit that the mind exists. The proof is that you can hear my words right now. The mind has limitless capabilities. It can hear, it can see, it can talk, it can think. All of these are activities of the mind. So there is such a world. Everyone knows this, but there are not that many people who seriously contemplate what mind is. They probably think it's so commonplace. Then they tend to pursue only the world outside themselves that they can see. The so-called natural sciences examine the various phenomena. But who is that one who is pursuing and investigating in that way? Few are the people who pursue the matter of discovering that self. The world of the denominator in my fraction is discovered in the Zen experience of enlightenment. Be aware, however, that I make a division into numerator and denominator for the sake of explanation. The actual reality, nevertheless, is the entire fraction itself. The "dharma-body" referred to in the Instruction might be considered to be the denominator in relation to the numerator, but here it means the entire fraction itself. It is our true self. The true fact is "we ourselves." Although we make a division into numerator and denominator, it is the concrete fact or reality. The world of enlightenment referred to here is the world of the denominator, the world of not a single thing (i.e. pure and clear). If we cling to that world of purity, the dharma-body is "killed," so to speak. This is what happens when we cling solely to the world of the denominator, i.e., the essential world. To be sure, we must come to a realization of the world of the denominator, but then we must pass beyond that and return to the fraction itself. If we cling to the world of satori, we might have a nice feeling, since there is nothing at all, no suffering at all. It is said that even Shakyamuni Buddha, after his great enlightenment, remained about a week in that world of satori. However, this purity is actually a scratch on the true fact. This is the meaning of the second part of the line:

And ruins Gyoho through purity. I will be talking about Gyoho later in this teisho. Let me just say here that our true reality is purity itself. The fraction itself is the true fact, but when we lean solely on the world of the denominator (essential world) we "damage" it, so to speak. There is a story behind this reference to Gyoho. Some of you might be familiar with the famous Qu Yuan (jap, Kutsugen) who lived in ancient China. He was an outstanding minister and had the responsible and powerful position of *Ryotaifu* under the king. But other people slandered him and he was forced to leave his post. Beside himself with grief, he left on a journey and killed himself by jumping into the River Mi-lo while holding a large stone. He was banished from the court and

wandered in despair until he came to the bank of a river. There he met Gyofu, a fisherman. The fisherman asked him if he wasn't the court minister and wanted to know why he had wandered to such a place. Qu Yuan said everyone was tainted and he alone was pure, that all were drunk and he alone was sober. He said this was the reason he had been banished from the court. Evidently Gyofu found no words of pity, at least none are written in the records. Instead he tapped on the gunwale of his boat and silently rowed away, singing the following song.

When the water is clear, I wash my tassels, but when it too muddy for silk, I can still wash my feet. The song expresses how Gyofu freely adapts to the situation whether clear or muddy, favorable or adverse. Unless we can freely adapt to our circumstances, we suffer greatly. It is the innate nature of the human being to be able to adapt to one's circumstances, whatever that may be. But if there is a strong sense of ego or separate self, our innate freedom is lost. If our monthly salary is 100,000 yen, as long as we live a life in keeping with that salary we won't have any problems. The same goes if our salary is 300,000 yen, or whatever. But if we only have a salary of 100,000 yen and have a lifestyle requiring three times that amount, we're bound to run into difficulties. We have to live in strict accordance with our circumstances and situation. Recall the line from Hakuin Zenji's *Song of Zazen*:

All beings by nature are Buddha, as ice by nature is water.

We are all "water." But ordinary beings tend to freeze up into ice. When water becomes ice, a square piece of ice will not take the shape of a triangular vessel when you insert it there, even if you try breaking the ice down in small pieces. Qu Yuan might have been an illustrious minister, but Gyofu was his superior in terms of his character development. He was able to live peacefully, regardless of the circumstances. What does the line in the Instruction mean about "ruining Gyofu through purity"? It has often been said that if the water is too pure, no fish can live in it. If you are too pure, no one will dare to approach you. It's true enough that goldfish can't survive in distilled water. They can only live in water containing various substances and impurities. This line is saying that if we concentrate solely on the aspect of purity and only treasure that, then this will "ruin Gyofu" the fisherman, who did not cling to purity. You can think of this as referring to our true self.

Is there anyone who wants to extol such a thing or not? "Such a thing" means the world of satori, the world of "highest single color." This is the world where, even though we wish to save all beings, there are no beings to save! The Instruction is asking if there is anyone who would want to take joy in such a world.

On the Case:

Kyōzan pointed to the snow lion and said, "Is there any that goes beyond this color?" I imagine the "snow lion" was a statue of a lion covered with

snow so that it looked like a lion made of snow. Kyōzan points to that perfectly white snow lion and asks if there is anyone who transcends that perfect white. The perfect white is the world of satori, the world of emptiness.

Unmon said, "I would have pushed it over for him at once." Unmon was not present at that time when he made his statement. He no doubt said it at a much later date. He happened to hear about this question of Kyōzan and then said what he did: If I had been there I would have knocked over the snow lion immediately. What is he saying? He is presenting the world in which emptiness has been transcended. This is his way of responding to Kyōzan's question of whether anyone can surpass that color.

Setchō said, "He only knows how to push it over, but he doesn't know how to help it up." In this case, too, Setchō was not present at the time Kyōzan posed his question. He happened to hear about his question of Kyōzan's and Unmon's response in then making his statement. Case 46 of the *Gateless Gate* is "Stepping Forward From the Top of a Pole."

Master Sekisō said, "How will you step forward from the top of a hundred-foot pole?"

But then an eminent master of old, Master Chōsa, says the following:

"Even though one who is sitting on the top of a hundred-foot pole has entered realization, it not yet real. He must step forward from the top of the pole and manifest his whole body throughout the world, in ten directions."

In other words, the whole universe is no other than you yourself. You and the universe are one. Today's koan is talking basically about the same thing: transcending the world of satori. "Sitting on the top of a hundred-foot pole" means remaining in the world of satori. Unless we step forward from that pole (i.e. return to the ordinary world), it will not be the real thing.

With his statement, Setchō is saying in effect to Unmon, "That's certainly a wonderful activity, Unmon, to knock over the snow lion, but you only know how to knock it over, you don't know how to upright it." This is quite an interesting statement. I would like to see this in connection with the statement just quoted in the other koan about stepping forward from the top of the pole. This can be appraised in different ways from different angles. Banshō Rōjin, the author of the commentaries in the *Book of Serenity*, tells us that we must go beyond the pure white of the snow. That means that as long as there is that color white, there is something before your eyes. There is still that division between the color outside and the eyes. If you transcend that, there is no color. If there is no color it is transparent. But it will not do to remain in that transparent place. You must upend that transparency, he tells us. If you ask me, this is a sort of wordplay. I can understand what he's saying when he says white is transparent, but when it comes to the world of emptiness that one actually experiences

in enlightenment, it is only a matter of referring to it as white for the time being. From olden times, the characters for *bright* and *white* (*meihaku*) have been used to express the world of satori. What concrete difference is there between this “white” and the “transparent world” mentioned by Banshō Rōjin? To repeat, “white” means the world of satori. If we continue on in our practice, we rid ourselves of different “colors” in the form of concepts until there is only white. From one perspective, it is always a matter of becoming transparent. If he had been speaking in terms of transparent from the beginning, that would have been fine. But since he speaks about white, this sort of discussion emerges. I see “white” here as referring to our own dharma-body, which completely lacks any color. Thus, to speak additionally of “transparent” aside from “white” seems to be a sort of wordplay. If you ask me, the state where white has been transcended is “all colors.” I would like to see it as, “All things return to the ONE.” If we borrow the phrase “form is emptiness, emptiness form,” we could say that “emptiness returns to form.” They are essentially one. I personally feel this is the genuine way to see this. You can understand it as all the colors of the phenomenal world. So, having once ascended to the pinnacle, we must once again descend to the phenomenal world. Otherwise we cannot save sentient beings. You can see pushing down the lion as pushing over the single aspect of the dharma-body. This is the aspect of *shōi* in the *Five Ranks of Hen and Shō*. The aspect of only knowing how to push over and not knowing how to right it again is the aspect of *hen'i* of the *Five Ranks*. In other words, it won't do to forget the aspect of the phenomenal. What is the actual fact? We could express it again in terms of the *Five Ranks* as *kenchūtō* (achieving the universal among the particular). The true self is the fraction itself. The koan is telling us not to dirty the fraction itself with the single aspect of the denominator (essential world). The actual fact can be expressed as the entire fraction itself encircled by a circle. Having realized the world of satori for the first time, we tend to want to stick to it and have trouble getting free of it. This entire koan is selling us that such an attitude will not do. It's certainly difficult, but we have to do it. Even if we understand the meaning of the words, unless it is accompanied by experience, we really don't understand.

On the Verse:

A knocking-down, a setting-up: the snow lion in the garden. This knocking down and setting up: Precisely *that* is the snow lion in the garden. In terms of my fraction, the knocking down is the denominator, the world of not one thing. Setting up is the numerator, the world of phenomena. The snow lion in the garden, (i.e. our true self) has both aspects.

Mindful about trespasses, [yet] he embraces kindness; In realizing that it is not right to trespass against the true fact, we have a heart of kindness. As I mentioned before, since we tend to stick to that all too pure state of the true fact, that

“scratches” or “damages” the true fact. And the verse it telling us not to do that.

Remember Kyōzan’s question: “Is there any that goes beyond this color?”

Brave in actions, they see righteousness. I can’t help feeling that this is referring to Unmon and Setchō. It is certainly brave to push over the lion. These lines from the Verse call to mind the famous lines from the *Confucian Analects: To see what is right and not do it is cowardice* (trans., Arthur Waley). When there’s something to be done, you have to do it. Here this is referring to how Setchō, in response to Unmon’s words, parries with “He only knows how to push it over, but he doesn't know how to help it up.” When it has to be said, then you say it, and as a result the koan comes to perfection. It is only then that our true dharma-body is established. It is looking at thing from the two aspects of the essential and the phenomenal. In the Verse, the poet first sings of Kyōzan and then sings the praises of Unmon and Setchō. This line of the Verse is the reverse of the line from Confucius: In other words, seeing what has to be done, they (i.e. Unmon and Setchō) do it, and that is true bravery.

The pure light shining into the eyes, one loses the way home; The “pure light” can be seen as the moonlight, silvery white. The moonlight shines on the white snow. Returning home means returning to our own true self. However, if you only focus on that beautiful world of satori, you might end up being dazzled by it. The verse is telling us that it’s a matter of forgetting to return home.

Turning from clarity, one falls into the state. This word “clarity” (*meihaku*), which I mentioned already above, also appears in a koan concerning Jōshū, where he refers to “picking and choosing” and “clarity” and tells us we must not cling to that world of satori. But even though we try to dodge it, we “fall into the state,” which means we get stuck in the stages or “states” of the world of difference (world of phenomena). There are no such states or stages in the world of satori, since there is nothing at all. But there are such stages in the phenomenal world. Tōzan Zenji makes a division into five states or stages, and the line from the Verse means sticking to any one of those stages.

Patch-robed monks never have anything to rely upon after all;

Born together, dying together – how can one say who is here and who is there? In Japanese, monks are referred to as *shukke*, which means “leaving home,” because they are not supposed to rely on anything. Only then can they obtain true freedom. They must become those who are “born together and die together.” This is actually referring to Kyōzan, Unmon and Setchō. It says that their Zen state of consciousness is the same. And thus: who could ever say this one is good and this one not?

We still have two lines to examine. The first lines are referring to “helping up” or “propping up.” We can see this as meaning the world of phenomena. And what is said about them?

The warm tidings opening the plum buds, the spring comes to cold branches;

The chilly wind felling the leaves, the autumn purifies the river water. The “warm tidings” means the coming of spring. And when spring comes, the plum blossoms open up. This is a very poetic expression. Although it was very cold up to now, when spring comes, the flowers bloom. This is referring to the phenomenal world.

The second of the two lines is a scene in autumn. It refers to the cool clarity of the essential world, where there is not one thing. This must be seen as singing the aspect of pushing down. This final line of the poem is singing the world of satori. In the end, there must be both aspects. If there is only the single aspect of satori, there is no human warmth and feeling. You must return to the world of human beings so that true warmth can come. To be sure, we must realize the world of satori, but then we must go beyond that and enter once again the world of human beings. We must share their sufferings and help in any way we can to ease those sufferings. This is true Buddhism. Not only that, it is the truly religious person.