

CASE 28

Gokoku's Three Disgraces



By Yamada Kōun

Instruction:

A person wearing not even an inch of thread is nothing but a naked non-Buddhist;

A person chewing no grain of rice is definitively reduced to the red-faced king of devils.

Even if you are born in a holy place,

You cannot escape from the danger of falling down from a pole top.

Is there anywhere you can hide your disgrace?

Case:

A monk asked Gokoku, "How about when a crane perches on a withered pine tree?" Gokoku said, "It is a disgrace when seen from the ground."

The monk asked, "What about when every drop of water is frozen at once?" Gokoku said, "It's a disgrace after the sun has risen."

The monk asked, "At the time of the Eshō Persecution¹, where did the good Guardian Deities² of the Dharma go?" Gokoku said, "It is a disgrace for the two of them on both sides of the temple gate."

Verse:

The vigorous man, full of dignity and power, does not yet have any grey beard;

The young man, if not indignant about himself, cannot yet be feoffed as a duke.

I reflect upon the family tradition of pure and honorable people:

How the ox was not watered in the river where the ears were washed.

¹ Buddhism was suppressed by order of Emperor Bu (about 840).

² *Niō*-figures representing the two Deva kings on each side of the main gate of a Buddhist temple. They are considered to be protectors of the Dharma.

On the Instruction:

For some reason, a recording of Yamada Kôun Roshi's teisho on Case 28 is missing, and I have been asked to deliver a teisho on this case.

The *Book of Equanimity* (Shôyôroku) ranks with the *Blue Cliff Record* (Hekiganroku) as one of the most famous Zen texts. The *Blue Cliff Record* was produced by authors belonging to the Rinzai tradition, while the *Book of Equanimity* belongs more to the Soto tradition. It was Setchô Zenji who wrote Instructions as well as longer and shorter comments to hundred old cases (koans) together with Engo Kokin Zenji to create the present *Blue Cliff Record*. And it was Wanshi Shôkaku Zenji who made his own collection of 100 old cases. Setchô Zenji and Wanshi Zenji were evidently on good terms with each other as contemporaries.

It is hardly surprising that the *Blue Cliff Record* and the *Book of Equanimity* show differences coming from the distinctive spirits of the two schools of Zen. Sayings of the two masters have been passed down to us regarding this. Wanshi Zenji, author of the *Book of Equanimity*, reportedly said, "I place samadhi power prior to wisdom" (*ware wa jô wo saki ni shite e wo ato ni su*). Engo Zenji, the co-author of the *Blue Cliff Record*, said, "I place wisdom prior to samadhi power" (*ware wa e wo saki ni shite jô wo ato ni su*). Our position is to practice with koans from both collections and learn the strong points of both books. Several koans are found in both collections, although the *Blue Cliff Record* is bold and unrestrained while the *Book of Equanimity* is fine and detailed.

A person wearing not even an inch of thread. This is referring to a person who has nothing in his head, no delusion and concepts of self-other, let alone ideas of being enlightened. He or she has swept away all such concepts and become *tabula rasa*. It is the supremely enlightened person.

A person wearing not even an inch of thread is nothing but a naked non-Buddhist;

In ancient India there was a sect of practitioners who went naked. The Instruction says that being bereft of all concepts of enlightenment, being completely empty, is just like being a member of such a sect in India.

A person chewing no grain of rice is definitively reduced to the red-faced king of devils. The "person chewing no grain of rice," like the person wearing not a stitch of clothing, is an allusion to the world of perfect enlightenment (jap, *daigo tettei*). A person who does not eat a single grain of rice has no desires and nothing further to search for. It is such a person. He's like the cock of the walk among the neighborhood kids!

Even if you are born in a holy place,

You cannot escape from the danger of falling down from a pole top. Even though you may have reached such a state, isn't it just like sitting on the top of a high pole and not being able to take a single step?

Is there anywhere you can hide your disgrace? "Isn't that the height of disgrace and shame?" the Instruction asks us.

On the Case:

A monk asked Gokoku, "How about when a crane perches on a withered pine tree?" The crane presents an image of something unstained and noble. And this crane is sitting on an ancient pine tree that seems to be more than a thousand years old. This is expressing the state of mind of a person who does not need anything more, since all problems have been solved. Whatever happens, he or she is not perturbed in the least. That person wants nothing and fears nothing, is completely satisfied with things as they are. He or she has completely realized the world of emptiness. The monk is asking how things are for such a person.

Gokoku said, "It is a disgrace when seen from the ground." The two Chinese characters *mo-ra* translated here as "disgrace" are a phonological approximation of the Sanskrit word *mālā*. Gokoku says that such a state of perfect enlightenment is a "disgrace when seen from the ground" under the pine tree.

Let me digress for a moment. I am now a member of management at a bank, and a black car with a chauffeur comes to pick me up at my home every morning. The bank is having a hard time and is striving to cut costs. For example, lower ranked managers don't get such service, but since I am now higher up the corporate ladder I can take forty winks in the car if I'm tired or look at important documents. I justify this special service to myself by telling myself that, if I were to travel on the train, I might even lose such important documents. When we arrive at the bank we descend into an underground parking lot, making a sharp turn to the right to enter that area. At that time I see lots of other bank employees walking on both sides of the car, and I really feel ashamed at such times. It's a feeling of shame you can't put in words. But that embarrassing situation of passing those other bank employees only lasts a few seconds. Especially on days like today, when it's raining, I tend to use the chauffeured black limousine for such reasons. But even a member of management who is above me doesn't ride in a limousine, even on such rainy days. The other day I asked him why he didn't ride in the limousine offered to him and he said he would be too ashamed. It's not just that he's ashamed to pass by other bank employees who have to walk. He's ashamed to ride in a limousine at all. I had to admire his attitude.

There's this idea of "I have realized enlightenment." There is a period in practice when such thoughts might be in your head. It is said that even Shakyamuni

Buddha remained in such a state for about three weeks. It is not unusual for many people to remain five or six years in such a state.

On the other hand, you must be able to realize at least to such an extent the world where there is “not a speck of cloud obstructing the view,” the world “where there are no sentient beings to save, even though you want to.” Otherwise, you will not be able to save others.

Although you may have completely grasped the world of emptiness in kensho, seeing things from below the tall pine tree, it is a “disgrace.” Even though you might feel fine in your realized state, that experience is good for nothing. You have not realized that this is most unseemly.

The monk asked, “What about when every drop of water is frozen at once?” The consciousness of having realized the world of emptiness has completely disappeared. There is no trace of the world of satori, the world of illusion, the world of dualistic opposition. Such a consciousness does not move even a bit in your mind. The monk asks, “what about such a state?”

Gokoku said, “It's a disgrace after the sun has risen.” When the sun rises, such ice just melts away. “Isn't that a disgrace?” Gogoku asks. From the viewpoint of a person whose heart is brimming with compassion, this may be the world of emptiness where every drop of water is frozen, where there are no sentient beings to save. But from the standpoint of compassion, such a state of consciousness is a disgrace.

The monk asked, “At the time of the Eshō Persecution, where did the good Guardian Deities of the Dharma go?” This is referring to the five-year period of persecution of Buddhism that occurred during the reign of the Emperor Wu of the Tang Dynasty. It is said that some 260,000 monks and nuns were forced to return to lay life during this persecution. This was in 745 AD. The monk wants to know what happened to the Guardian Deities at that time, which were supposed to protect Buddhism; he ask how such a persecution was possible.

Gokoku said, “It is a disgrace for the two of them on both sides of the temple gate.” The entrances to Buddhist temples are guarded by statues of the Garden Deity (jap, Niô). It is actually a single deity divided into two figures with stern faces to guard both sides of the entrance. The monk wants to know: What about those garden deities that are supposed to protect the dharma during that period of persecution of Buddhism? Gokoku says it is “a disgrace for the two of them on both sides of the temple gate.” But where lies the disgrace? You say that they are supposed to defend the dharma, but where is there any dharma to defend, and how can it be protected? There is no such a way.

What is the dharma after all? To come straight to the point, it is this stick here. Let's say I take a match and set the stick on fire, burning it up. It burns producing a

roaring sound. That is dharma. It burns and become ashes. That is dharma. I bury that ash in the ground. That is also dharma. All of them are dharma. Let's assume for the moment that the Emperor Wu had temples burned to the ground during the period of persecution. The temples burned to the ground, leaving nothing. That is the dharma. He ordered the monks to return home to lay life. It is wrong to assume that being a monk is the dharma and being a layperson is not the dharma. Because everything is the dharma, even if you were to try to defend it you couldn't. There is no need to defend anything. Gogoku says it is a disgrace to put on a stern or fearful face and say you are going to defend the dharma. He is saying that people who think that is possible to do such a thing have not really understood.

I would now like to return to the origin point and to explain to you my view of what is meant by the world of the dharma or the world of the real fact, although it is difficult to convey such a thing.

If you look at the person who has not a stitch of clothes from the essential viewpoint, you can ask: Can anything be put on, is there a way to do such a thing? Since there is nothing at all from the start, there is nothing to put on and nothing on which to put it. It is completely empty. But to remain in such a world is an error. This koan is trying with all its might to bring this point home to us, otherwise we will remain stuck in this world where not a stitch of clothing is put on.

Unmon Zenji says it as follows: "Wearing clothes and eating rice the whole day." This itself is the world of the Verse: Wearing not even an inch of thread and chewing no grain of rice. This is difficult to understand but this is the true reality. I would like you all to somehow realize this world.

Lately I have been using a personal computer. Have you ever used Microsoft Windows? There are a lot of "windows" to open in the program, including Word for Windows, or Excel or others. If you double-click an icon in a window, another screen suddenly appears, which also has several icons to be clicked. If you click any one of them you enter another window, and so on, in a continuous process of a world extending out before you. Click an icon and a window opens. Click an icon there and the window closes. But the basis is a single white screen, which does not move at all.

It's as if the crane is standing there before the screen doing its best. It is only looking at this screen, and says it can do anything, that there's nothing to worry about. It's satisfied just to sit in front of the windows. But that isn't good for anything, is it? It's only looking at a single screen. But unless you open one of the windows, nothing is going to happen.

A young woman of 18 or 19 can open Windows and have fun using it freely. But an older man who might be happy to have bought a computer just sits there with the initial screen in front of him. From the young woman's point of view, that old fellow

appears quite stupid. That's really how you feel when seeing him sitting there looking at the initial screen.

There's the saying, "wanting to save all beings, I discover no sentient beings." But when you open the windows, so to speak, there they are. To say "there is nothing" just shows that you don't know how to open the windows. In English you often use the word "empty" to describe it, but that's not sufficient.

Yamada Kōun Roshi often used to say "the content is empty" (nakami karappo), which I honestly feel to be OK as an expression, although even that is not complete. It's naturally because people don't know how to use it correctly. The bad thing about the expression "content is empty" (nakami karappo) is that you might assume that there is an "outside" as opposed to an "inside" and that which is inside is somehow empty. But that's not how it really is. There is nothing but it appears as this stick. But just in that appearing it is empty.

I feel the expression "form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form" is an apt expression in the *Heart Sutra*. If you open Windows, a screen appears. That is the world of emptiness appearing. That's my feeling about it. It is just as stupid to apprehend it as the world of empty oneness as to apprehend it as the world of phenomena. From the point of view of the true fact, both are only half. This is what this case is talking about when it says it is a "disgrace."

On the Verse:

The vigorous man, full of dignity and power, does not yet have any grey beard; This is referring to a monk, it says that the monk is very earnest and starchy, and earnestly points to the essence of things, but still lacks true maturity, as implied in saying that he has no gray beard.

The young man, if not indignant about himself, cannot yet be feoffed as a duke. Unless he exerts himself he will not realize the real thing.

I reflect upon the family tradition of pure and honorable people: This is a reference to the world where there is no dualistic opposition, perfectly white and spotless, it speaks about the person who has realized the world of MU.

How the ox was not watered in the river where the ears were washed. This story evidently first appears in the *Book of History (Shih-chi)*, a Confucian classic. During the reign of the Shao Emperor, there lived the man Kyoyû (Xuyou), known for his stainless reputation. Because he had such a sterling reputation, the Shao Emperor proposed to him that he give over governing of the country to him. Kyoyû, wanting nothing to do with such "dirty" matters as government or the rank of king, hid himself away in the mountains. Hearing of this, the Shao Emperor sent envoys to ask the other man to become a minister if he was so averse to becoming king. Hearing this, Kyoyû said his ears had been dirtied, and made a point of going to the

river to wash his ears. A man named Chaofu happened to be watering his ox in the river. Seeing Kyoyū there washing his ears, he asked him what he was doing, whereupon Kyoyū told him the whole story of the “dirty” matters for which he was now washing his ears. Hearing this, Chaofu told Kyoyū that it was because he was putting on airs of being beyond reproach and saintly that the Emperor had asked him to be king. He then refused to water his ox in the water that this “dirty” fellow had used to wash his ears and took the ox further upstream to water it there. This spirit has existed in China since ancient times, I feel.

Even though you have realized ever deeper, the way continues on. This is the world spoken of in this koan. I hope you will all realize the world spoken of by Unmon: “Although you wear clothes and eat food all day, you do not wear an inch of thread and do not chew a grain of rice.”