

CASE 93

Rogo Does Not Understand

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Instruction:

Jewels from Mt. Kei [are used to] strike down magpies, an old rat bites a gold piece. They don't understand their own treasure, they can't make use of it. Is there anyone who suddenly finds the gem hidden in their own clothes?

Case:

Roso asked Nansen, "'People do not recognize the Mani-jewel. I picked it up myself in the Tathagata treasury.' What is this treasury?"

Nansen said, "Old Master O exchanges questions and answers with you. That's it."

Shiso said, "How about when there is no exchange of questions and answers?"

Nansen said, "That's also the treasury."

Shiso said, "What is the jewel?"

Nansen said, "Reverend Shiso!"

Shiso said, "Yes!"

Nansen said, "Get out. You don't understand my words."

Verse:

Differentiating "yes" and "no," clarifying "gain" and "loss";
Responding to it in the heart, pointing everything in the palm.
Coming and going, not coming and not going – both are nothing but treasury.
King Tenrin rewarded the worthy ones with it,
Emperor Yellow found it through a blind man.
Turning the pivotal activities, well-versed in the art:
You clear-eyed monks, never take it carelessly!

On the Instruction:

Jewels from Mt. Kei [are used to] strike down magpies, an old rat bites a gold piece. They don't understand their own treasure, they can't make use of it.

Is there anyone who suddenly finds the gem hidden in their own clothes? The "jewels from Mt. Kei" are a special, rare sort of jewel. They are also known as the "jewels of the collected castles of Mr. Chao." There is the famous story of how the king of Chin offered to make an exchange of fifteen castles for Benka's jewel. The jewel of Benka was evidently one of the jewels that came from Mt. Kei. The Instruction says that such a jewel was used to strike down magpies, which might make us ask what this is all about. In other words, although it

was a jewel, the people thought it was nothing more than a roadside stone. This is indicating a situation where we do not know the true worth of something. As for the “old rat biting a gold piece,” this too is a case of not knowing the true worth of something. These statements are said with their sights set on the Main Case.

To say that they “don’t understand their own treasure” means that, not only do they fail to realize how precious it is, they do not even know how to make use of it. The final line about “suddenly finding the gem hidden in their own clothes” is also based on an old story. One day a man was drinking with his friend and became quite tipsy. That night, that friend had to leave on an urgent errand for a place faraway. Believing that his drunken companion did not have any money, he sewed a jewel into the other man’s coat and left, but the other man himself was unaware of it. When he awoke the next morning, he discovered that his friend had gone. After roaming around for a while, he eventually descended to the level of a beggar. Because he was not aware of the jewel sewn into his coat, he looked for all the world like a beggar when his friend returned. Upon being told by that friend that there was actually a jewel sewn into his coat, he finally realized what a treasure he possessed. He exchanged the jewel for gold and became a rich man. Here too, the jewel is a reference to one’s own true self. This story originally appears in the *Lotus Sutra* in the chapter about the Five Hundred Disciples. Although I have not read the story in the original, the account is reproduced in other books, so there is no mistaking its veracity.

On the Case:

Roso asked Nansen, “‘People do not recognize the Mani-jewel. I picked it up myself in the Tathagata treasury.’ What is this treasury?” The words that Roso quotes are originally found in the *Shōdōka* (Song of Enlightenment). Here is another translation of the same passage as found in the translation by Robert Aitken:

People do not recognize the Mani-jewel.

Living intimately within the Tathagata-garbha

We have already encountered the name Roso in Case 23 of this collection: Roso Faces the Wall. Many people might assume the person in today’s case is the same person, but that is not necessarily the case. Roso was a disciple of Baso, which would have made him a dharma brother of Nansen or Hyakujo, for example. His full name was Roso Gyokujun. He is actually known as a brother in dharma of Nansen. These matters are treated in considerable detail in the longer commentary by Banshō Rojin, the author of the *Book of Equanimity*. There it says that it would not have been possible for Roso to be asking such a thing to Nansen, who was his younger brother in the dharma. Among the students of Nansen was Shiso. It is said that this Shiso was mistakenly assumed to be a student of Nansen Fugan Zenji. No matter how we consider things, it has no connection with the actual essence of the matter. Let us assume, then, that, instead of Roso, it was Shiso posing the question. Then it would be as follows.

Shiso asked Nansen, “‘People do not recognize the Mani-jewel. I picked it up myself in the Tathagata treasury.’ What is this treasury?” What is the Mani-jewel spoken of here? It is also known as the jewel of suchness. The word Mani jewel means that it is pure and unstained. This is a reference to our true essence, to our true self. Both are possible meanings for Mani jewel. Let us assume here that it means the jewel of suchness. All of your minds are this jewel of suchness. In our mind are contained all virtue and wisdom of the Buddha without limit. That is why we say that all beings are intrinsically Buddha. In that sense, mind means that our true aspect or true essence does not differ a whit from Buddha. We unenlightened beings (bonpu) are completely the same true aspect as Buddha. This is a wondrous power. How have we come into possession of it? Most people are unaware of it, even though they possess it. Even though they are unaware of it, it is in their possession in this treasury. How do we become aware of it? By realizing our true nature. Shiso then asks, “What is this treasury?” Although it is said that this is picked up in the Tathagata treasury, what is that treasury? To repeat, this is referring to your own mind. What does Nansen say in reply?

Nansen said, "Old Master Ō exchanges questions and answers with you. That's it." Nansen is referring to himself when he says "Old Master Ō." I, Nansen, have been talking with you about it all along. That's it! Me speaking like this and you listening like that, that's it! What does Shiso now say?

Shiso said, "How about when there is no exchange of questions and answers?" "How is it, then, when we are not having such an exchange?" Shiso wants to know.

Nansen said, "That's also the treasury." In other words, when you're completely silent, that's it too. But Shiso is unrelenting.

Shiso said, "What is the jewel?" He wants to know what that Mani jewel is.

Nansen said, "Reverend Shiso!"

Shiso said, "Yes!"

Nansen said, "Get out. You don't understand my words." This might be at the juncture where you want to tell Shiso once again, "That's it!" But Nansen doesn't do that. He calls out "Reverend Shiso!" and then says, "Get out. You don't understand my words."

That's all there is to the koan. It's very simple, but if you don't understand it from actual experience, you will remain dithering and won't really understand at the end of the day.

On the Verse:

Differentiating "yes" and "no," clarifying "gain" and "loss"; Who differentiates like this? It is the Mani jewel, which clearly judges between gain and loss.

Responding to it in the heart, pointing everything in the palm. "Responding to it in the heart" means it responds reflexively to everything with complete appropriateness, just like a mirror reflecting the various images. "Pointing everything in the palm" means clearly and precisely without thinking or considering. It is completely appropriate to the time, place and occasion. What has such ability? Once again, it is the Mani jewel. Our true self has such a capability.

Coming and going, not coming and not going – both are nothing but treasury. It is just as we have heard it in the Main Case. "Coming and going" can be understood as questioning and answering. "Not coming and going" means keeping silent. Both of these are the treasury. This is the Tathagata treasury or Tathagata gharba. It is referring to your own mind. Both of them are the mind.

King Tenrin rewarded the worthy ones with it,

Emperor Yellow found it through a blind man. Behind these lines lies a story, which is difficult to understand.

King Tenrin was very pleased to see his troops comporting themselves so bravely in battle, and awarded those who had distinguished themselves. We, too, practice with all our might and receive the award of enlightenment. This is what is being referred to here.

The second line about the Yellow Emperor is also based on an old story. The Yellow Emperor was one of the famous Sainted Emperors of Chinese mythological antiquity. He happened to be walking on the bank of a river and accidentally dropped a jewel and lost it. He first sent his wise men out to search for it but they were unable to find it. Then he called on the aid of his sharp-eyed vassals, but they too had no luck. Then he sent his most gifted orators but they, too, could not find it. Finally he sent out a blind man named Mosho who was able to find the jewel. What is this referring to? The skills of the other persons, such as wisdom, sharp-sightedness or oratory skills, are all worldly wisdom. They are known as *sechiben* in Japanese. Dōgen Zenji, for example, had little respect for persons who only possessed such worldly wisdom. Although he did not call them fools outright, he did not show them any respect. That is because they make no efforts to grasp their true nature. But such people fond of worldly wisdom are good at amassing wealth. Although this is of course to their detriment, persons in commerce and business are such persons. No matter how much business

acumen someone might have, when he is faced with the problem of death, his special skills will be of no avail. No matter how much wealth he might have amassed, he will remain unable to solve the problem of life and death. He will remain unable to solve the most important matter of our lives. In such a case, a blind man is best. But in this case “blind” means that there are no thoughts or concepts in your head. This could be seen as meaning a person who has died the great death. Persons who have truly realized their true nature are known as “truly blind.” This means that there is no one who sees and nothing that is seen.

Recall in this connection the lines from the *Diamond Sutra*:

*“If you try to see me through colors
And to seek me through voices and sounds,
You are on a false path;
You will not be able to see the Tathagata.”
How can you see the Tathagata?*

If you try to find the Tathagata even in a beautiful flower, you will not be able to see the Tathagata. If your eyes are open, how can you become blind? That’s the problem. To become blind means to realize great enlightenment suddenly and vividly.

Turning the pivotal activities, well-versed in the art: The pivot is a very important part of the wheel, for it is there that the wheel turns. To be “well-versed in the art” means to have the ability to turn a person’s illusions into enlightenment. That’s the important thing. You must be able to do that.

You clear-eyed monks, never take it carelessly! He calls on us Zen practitioners to be very circumspect. The preceding line about “turning the pivotal activities, well-versed in the art” speaks of a most important matter, since it means turning people from illusion to enlightenment. One must have the ability and power to bring people to realization. The final line of today’s koan poses the question: What is the jewel? Recall Nansen’s reply and the ensuing exchange:

*Nansen said, “Reverend Shiso!”
Shiso said, “Yes!”
Nansen said, “Get out. You don’t understand my words.”*

I think we can see these responses of Nansen as a case of “turning the pivotal activities, well-versed in the art.” Instead of giving him the answer straight out, he says, “Get out. You don’t understand my words.” It would not have been right to simply say “precisely THAT is it.” Instead he says, “Get out. You don’t understand my words.” This, too, is being “well-versed in the art.” One must have such ability. This calls to mind a section from the *Platform Sutra* of the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng which involves the Monk Garin.

Monk Garin composed the following verse to describe his state of consciousness:

*I, Garin, know a device
Whereby to blot out all my thoughts:
The objective world no more stirs the mind,
And daily matures my Enlightenment!*

In reply the Sixth Patriarch composed the following verse:

*I, Hui-neng, know no device
My thoughts are not suppressed:
The objective world ever stirs the mind,
And what is the use of maturing Enlightenment?*

The enlightenment has been matured from the very beginning, since it is our true nature. As I am always saying, there should be no will or guile. For example, when you are practicing MU, all manner of thoughts will arise in your mind. People ask me what I should do. I tell them they should just let those thoughts fall away and pay no attention to them, but many are unable to do so. Instead, they try to bring the thoughts to a stop. They are then like the Monk Garin. It then becomes some sort of skill. Any attempt to stop your thoughts will be of no use. Just leave the thoughts as they are and devote yourself single-mindedly to MU.