

KOANS for the
WE WALK on the EMPTY SKY RETREAT
April 2004

Traveler, it is your footsteps,
the road – nothing more.
Traveler, there is no road,
you make the road by walking.
Antonio Machado

Shoushan said to his assembly, "If you get it the first time you hear it, you will be the teacher of the buddhas and ancestors. If you get it the second time you hear it, you will be the teacher of gods and humans. If you get it the third time, you can't even save yourself."

A monk asked, "When did you get it?"

Shoushan said, "The moon sets at midnight; I walk alone through the town."

If we were not so single minded about keeping our lives moving,
and for once could do nothing,
Perhaps a huge silence might interrupt this sadness
of never understanding ourselves
and of threatening ourselves with death.

Pablo Neruda

Knock on yourself as upon a door and walk upon yourself as on a straight road.
Silvanus

... hand in the dark
plucking at the knot that
the same hand tied
in the light.

Robert Pinsky

A monk asked Baoshou Zhao, "When all the realms come forward and overwhelm you, then what?"

Baoshou answered, "Ignore it."

The monk bowed.

Baoshou then said, "Don't move. If you move it will break you in two at the waist."

KOANS for BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY

In medieval Japan, the nuns of the great temple of Tokeiji would take up the poems composed by earlier teachers and nuns as koans. Here are some poems for Buddha's Birthday, written by Yodo, the 5th abbess of Tokeiji, and her attendants, along with the questions about them that were asked in later generations.

1

Decorate your own heart,
for the buddha of the flower hall
is nowhere else.

How do you recognize your own heart?

How would you decorate the flower hall?

If you revere a buddha who is in your own heart, what do you need with a flower hall?

2

Throw the past into the street.
What is born in its place, on the flower altar,
let it raise its newborn cry.

When the past has been thrown away, what is born in its place?

Let's hear the newborn cry.

Where is the flower altar?

3

Born, and forgetting the parents who bore you –
the parents who are Shakyamuni and Guanyin.

Where is the birth?

Where are Shakyamuni and Guanyin?

What happens when parents and child come face to face?