

Koans for the Spring Comes with its Blossoms Retreat

Koans for Buddha's Birthday *In medieval Japan, the nuns of the great temple of Tokeiji would take up poems composed by earlier teachers and nuns as koans. Here are some poems for Buddha's Birthday, written by Yodo, the fifth abbess of Tokeiji, and her attendants, along with the questions about them that were asked in later generations. It was the custom on Buddha's Birthday, then as now, to fill the hall with flowers and place a statue of the baby Buddha on the altar.*

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?

□

Yunyan asked a monk what he was doing. The monk said, "I've been talking to a rock."
Yunyan asked, "Did it nod to you in reply?"
When the monk didn't answer, Yunyan answered for him, "It nodded to you even before you said anything."

Foyan asked, "How about when they say that the sound of the rain is giving you a sermon? Is that right? I don't think so: The sound of the rain is *you* giving a sermon. But do you understand? If you do, what else is there?"

For whom do you bathe and make yourself beautiful?
The voice of the cuckoo is calling you home.
Hundreds of flowers fall, but its voice isn't stilled;
even deep in the mountains, the call is clear.

Dongshan