

RAIN DANCE KOANS APRIL 2006

Someone asked the teacher Shishuang about the meaning of Chan. He replied, "Let's say there's someone in a thousand-foot well; if you can get her out without using any rope, I'll answer you about the meaning of Chan."

Later Huiji asked his teacher, Danyuan, "How would you get the person out of the well?"

Danyuan retorted, "Idiot! Blockhead! Who's in a well?" Huiji didn't understand, and later he asked another teacher, Guishan, the same question.

Guishan called out, "Huiji!" When Huiji answered "Yes," Guishan said, "There, he's out of the well!"

Later, when Huiji became the teacher known as Yangshan, he would always tell this story to his students, saying, "I grasped what it *is* at Danyuan's place, I grasped how it *works* at Guishan's."

The great way is not difficult—just don't pick and choose.

Fengxue gave a talk at the office of the provincial government, which included a fierce dialogue with a monk. The Chief Magistrate commented, "The Buddha's law and the emperor's law have the same nature."

Fengxue asked, "What do you mean?"

The Magistrate said, "When called upon to make a judgment, you must judge. Otherwise you invite disorder."

Richard Wilhelm, translator of the *I Ching*, told C.G. Jung this story: A severe drought gripped the Chinese province where Wilhelm was living; there hadn't been a drop of rain for months, and the situation was growing catastrophic. Catholics made processions, Protestants made prayers, and Buddhists burned incense and shot off guns to frighten away the drought demons, but to no avail. Finally the people decided to fetch the rainmaker, and a dried up old man from another province

appeared. All he asked for was a quiet little house, where he locked himself in for three days. On the fourth day the clouds gathered, bringing not just rain but a snowstorm, out of season and very heavy. The town was so full of rumors about the wonderful rainmaker that Wilhelm went to ask him how he did it. The old Taoist said, "I'm not responsible for the snow."

"But what have you been doing these three days?"

"Oh, I can explain that. I come from another country where things are in harmony with the Tao. Here they are not in harmony, and so neither was I. I had to wait three days until I was back in the Tao and then, naturally, the rains came."

Someone takes you skydiving as a birthday gift. You learn all the safety procedures, but just after you jump you realize that you don't have a parachute. What do you do?

Shortly before his death, the sculptor Henry Moore was asked if he believed there was a secret to life. "The secret to life," Moore answered without hesitation, "is to have something you devote your entire life to, something you bring your whole self to each day. And the most important thing is – it must be something you cannot possibly do."

What sort of future is coming up from behind I don't really know. But the past, spread out ahead, dominates everything in sight.

Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

Ch'an master Miaotsung used to say, "Each being's eternal radiance appears before you. Each being is an 8,000 foot precipice." She also said, "We exchange our radiances, spreading them out around us like a beautiful silken net."