

*Koans*

for the

*Make the Mountains Dance*

*(Again) Retreat*

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*Koans, Freedom, & Love*



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## FIRST EVENING

In your life right now, what is it you lack, what is it that practice must mend?

~ Linji



A woman asked, "What is Zen?"  
"The heart of the one who asks is Zen," an old Chinese teacher replied.



All things die and all things live forever;  
but our task is to die,  
to die making roads,  
roads over the sea.

~ Antonio Machado, from *Proverbs and Folk Songs*

## FIRST DAY

### Getting Free

Quickly, without thinking good and evil, before your parents were born – what is your original face?



Shoushan held up his short bamboo staff and said, "If you call this a staff, you're stuck in concepts. If you don't call it a staff, you ignore the facts. Tell me, what do you call it?"



Linji said, "There is nothing I dislike."



Save a ghost



Sickness and medicine correspond to each other.  
The whole world is medicine.  
What is the self?

~ Yunmen



"In the day there is sunlight, at night there is firelight.  
What is divine light?"

Zhaozhou replied, "Sunlight, firelight."

## *SECOND DAY*

### **The Courage of Love**

The Ballad of Janet and Tam Lin

Oh, I forbid you maidens all  
That wear gold in your hair  
To come or go by Carterhaugh<sup>1</sup>  
For young Tamlin is there

And those that go by Carterhaugh  
From them he takes a wad,<sup>2</sup>  
Either their rings or green mantles  
Or else their maidenheads!

So Janet has kilted her green mantle  
Just a little above her knee,  
And she has gone to Carterhaugh  
Just as fast as she could flee.

She had not pulled a double rose,  
A rose but three or four,  
When up and spoke this young Tam Lin,  
Crying "Lady, pull no more!

How dare you pull those flowers!  
How dare you break those wands!  
How dare you come to Carterhaugh  
Withouten my command?"

She says, "Carterhaugh it is my own  
My Father gave it me,  
And I will come and go by here  
Withouten any leave of thee!"

He's taken her by the milk-white hand  
Among the leaves so green  
And what they did I cannot say  
The green leaves were between

Now since you've had your will of me  
Come tell to me your name  
But she nothing heard and nothing saw  
And all the woods grew dim

Janet's kilted her green, green skirt  
A little above her knee  
And she is to her father's hall  
As fast as she can hie

There were four and twenty ladies gay  
All sitting down at chess,  
In and come the fair Janet,  
As pale as any glass.

Out then spoke an old grey knight  
Lay over the castle wall  
And ever alas, fair Janet, for thee  
But we'll be blamed for all

Oh hold your tongue, you ill-faced knight  
Some ill death may you die  
Father my child on whom I will

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<sup>1</sup> A haugh is a marshy wilderness under water part of the year

<sup>2</sup> A wad is a pledge or a fee

I'll father none on thee

Up and spake her father dear,  
He spake up meek and mild,  
"Oh alas, sweet Janet," he cried,  
"I fear you go with child!"

"And if I go with child,  
It is myself to blame!  
There's not a lord in all your hall  
Shall give my child his name!"

If my true love were an earthly knight  
As he's an elfin grey  
I would not give my own true love  
For any lord here today

The horse that my true love rides on  
Is lighter than the wind  
With silver he is shod before  
With burning gold behind

Out then spoke her mother dear  
And ever alas, said she  
I know an herb in the merry green wood  
That will scathe thy babe from thee

Janet has kilted her green mantle  
Just a little above her knee,  
And she has gone to Carterhaugh  
For to pull the scathing tree.

"How dare you pull that herb  
All among the leaves so green

For to kill the bonny babe  
That we got us between!"  
"You must tell to me Tam Lin,  
Ah you must tell to me,  
Were you once a mortal knight  
Or mortal hall did see?"

Oh, I will tell the truth, Janet  
A truth - I will not lie -  
It's truth I've been in holy chapel  
And christened as well as thee

But once it fell upon a day  
As hunting I did ride  
As I rode East and I rode West  
Strange chance did me betide

There blew a drowsy, drowsy wind  
And sleep upon me fell  
The Queen of Fairies she was there  
And she took me to herself

And pleasant is the Fairy Land  
But a strange tale I'll tell,  
For at the end of seven years  
They pay a fine to Hell,

And I so fair and full of flesh  
I fear it is myself."

"Tomorrow night is Halloween,  
And the Fairy Folk do ride;  
Those that would their true love win

At Miles Cross they must hide!

But how shall I thee ken, Tamlin  
And how shall I thee know?  
Among so many unearthly knights  
The like I never saw?

First you let pass the black horse  
Then you let pass the brown,  
But run up to the milk white steed  
And pull the rider down.

“First they'll change me in your arms  
Into some esk or adder,  
Hold me close and fear me not,  
For I'm your child's father.

Then they'll turn me in your arms  
Into a lion wild.  
Hold me tight and fear me not  
As you would hold your child.

Then they'll turn me in your arms  
Into a red-hot bar of iron,  
Hold me close and fear me not,  
For I will do no harm.

Then they'll turn me in your arms  
Into some burning lead,  
Throw me into well-water  
And throw me in with speed.

Last they'll turn me in your arms

Into a naked knight  
Wrap me up in your green mantle,  
And hide me close from sight.”

Gloomy, gloomy was the night  
And eerie was the way  
When Janet in her green mantle  
To Miles Cross she did gae

About the middle of the night  
She heard the bridles ring  
Janet was as glad of that  
As any mortal thing  
First went by the black, black steed  
And then went by the brown  
But quickly she ran to the milk-white steed  
And pulled the rider down

And thunder rolled across the sky  
And the stars they burned like day  
And out then spoke the Queen of the Fairies  
Crying young Tamlin's away

So well she did what he did say  
She did her true love win,  
She wrapped him up in her mantle,  
As blythe as any bird in Spring.

Up and spake the Fairy Queen,  
And angry cried she,  
“If I'd have known of this Tam Lin,  
Before we came from home,  
I'd have plucked out thine heart of flesh

And put in a heart of stone!"  
If I'd but half the wit yestereen  
That I have bought today  
I'd have paid my tithes seven times to Hell  
E'er you'd been won away

### THIRD MORNING

#### 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 to fill the hall with flowers and place a statue of the baby Buddha on the altar on this day.*

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?

## *Bibliography*

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Both are translations of the Chinese collection Wumenguan (Japanese Mumonkan); they include contemporary commentaries on each koan, which make them a good place to begin exploring the tradition

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The Chinese Biyan Lu (Hekigan Roku), associated with the Linji (Rinzai) school. Dense, poetic, and sometimes perplexing, it's considered by many to be the richest and most challenging koan collection

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The Chinese Congrong Lu (Japanese Shoyo Roku), associated with the Caodong (Soto) school, compiled in the 12th century and including introductions, commentaries, and verses for each koan from that time

Francis H. Cook, *The Record of Transmitting the Light* (Center Publications, 1991)

A translation of the Japanese Denko Roku, written by Keizan Jokin in the early 14th century; it presents a legendary Zen lineage from Shakyamuni through Dogen, telling the enlightenment story of each ancestor in the form of a koan, with biographies and commentary

Trevor Leggett, *Samurai Zen: The Warrior Koans* (Routledge, 2003)

A collection of Japanese koans from the Kamakura era (13th century), including traditional poems and checking questions; one of the best sources for koans involving women

Victor Sogen Hori, *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Koan Practice* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2003)

The most extensive collection of capping phrases, brief original writings or quotes linked to a koan; includes a detailed description of contemporary koan practice in Japan

John Tarrant, *Bring Me the Rhinoceros: And Other Koans to Bring You Joy* (Harmony Books, 2004)

A new book by my collaborator in developing this way of working with koans, exploring a dozen koans in depth, from a thoroughly western perspective