

Koans
Self and Soul Koan III
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Shoushan's New Wife

Someone asked Shoushan, "What is Buddha?"

Shoushan said, "The new wife rides a donkey. The mother-in-law leads it by the bridle."

A Young Woman Comes Out of Deep Meditation

Once Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, set out for a place where many enlightened ones had assembled with the Buddha. When he arrived, he found that all the enlightened ones were returning to their original dwelling place. Only a young woman remained, seated in deep meditation near the Buddha.

Manjushri asked the Buddha, "Why can the young woman get near your seat when I cannot?"

The Buddha replied, "Awaken this young woman from her meditation and ask her yourself." Manjushri walked around the young woman three times, snapped his fingers once, took her up to the heavens, and exerted all his supernatural powers, but he couldn't bring her out.

The Buddha said, "Even a hundred thousand Manjushris couldn't wake her up. Down below, past lands as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges, lives the Bodhisattva of Delusive Wisdom. He will be able to bring her out of her meditation."

Instantly the Bodhisattva of Delusive Wisdom emerged from the earth and bowed to the Buddha, who made his request. Delusive Wisdom stepped before the young woman and snapped his fingers once; at this she came out of her meditation.

Wumen's Verse on the Koan

One can bring her out, the other can't;
both of them are free.
A god mask, a devil mask—
even in failure, an elegant performance.

Dongshan Does It for Another

Dongshan was sweeping one day when someone said to him, “Work, work, work — all you do is work.”

Dongshan replied, “I do it for another.”
“Why don’t you get that other to do it for herself?”
“Because she has no hands.”