

Gates
Miscellaneous Boats



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Preface

(Nice word, Preface, evoking the original face before yr parents were born. Anyway ...)

This PDF began its life as half of a book called *Acequias e³ Gates : Miscellaneous Koans and Miscellaneous Writings on Koans* by Joan Sutherland, in collaboration with designer Piper Leigh and artist Ciel Bergman. This is a lightly updated version of the *Gates* half, the Miscellaneous Koans collection of The Open Source and the Pacific Zen School.

Acequias e³ Gates was made with love, and Piper's and Ciel's contributions allowed us to create a book that paid homage to the beauty of the koan tradition. This PDF preserves the original *Ae³G* design as a way of carrying forward those original impulses toward love and beauty.

Since it began as a book, the *Gates : Miscellaneous Koans* PDF is meant to be read like a book, with two facing pages open in front of you (in Adobe, select View > Page Display > Two Page View).

Welcome to the Gates

Gates is a collection of koans that are portals between the known and unknown, the personal and the eternal — places where the worlds can meet and mix. The First Gate is the Miscellaneous Koans, part of the formal Pacific Zen School curriculum for koan study. The Second Gate is Awakened Life Koans, a collection that further illuminates the territory revealed by the bright flashes of the Miscellaneous. The two of them together provide a strong grounding in the koan tradition as we've come to understand it.

Each school has its own compilation of koans, which is studied along with the classical collections like the *Gateless Gateway* and *Blue Cliff Record*. While these compilations are called Miscellaneous Koans, there's nothing arbitrary or haphazard about them : they introduce the broad field of koan study and lay out what each school believes is essential to the Way. Miscellaneous compilations have always been a way of bringing in important koans that don't appear in the classical collections, and now our Miscellaneous Koans and the Awakened Life Koans are, vitally, receptacles for koans we're gathering from sources beyond East Asia, and for koans that begin to fill in some pretty important gaps, like the presence of women and the concerns of laypeople's lives.

The First Gate, the Miscellaneous Koans, is a collection begun when the Japanese Rinzai curriculum was reinvented by Hakuin Ekaku in the eighteenth century, eventually passed down through the Harada-Yasutani-Yamada (Sanbo Kyodan) line. Over the years, the sequence has been re-imagined by Pacific Zen School founders John Tarrant and Joan Sutherland. We included koans from other East Asian schools, as well as from Western literary sources; a few koans receded back into the vastness, and a number were created new by us. Which always makes me think of the question the poet Robert Creeley was asked during a class he was teaching : Is that a real poem or did you just make it up yourself? Western Miscellaneous collections are often bare lists of koans without supporting material, but I've added explanatory notes to help navigate unfamiliar territory.

The Second Gate, Awakened Life Koans, is a new collection I've been working on for awhile. It covers what the koans themselves say about working with koans, and what happens over time as we keep company with them; it's meant to help flesh out a life lived with the koans. Like the Miscellaneous, it draws on sources other than the major koan collections, including traditions besides Chan and Zen.

Unless otherwise attributed, all translations are mine. We'd appreciate your letting us know if we've missed any translation credits, so we can include them.

In the past the Miscellaneous was given to people at a particular time in their individual koan study; it wasn't meant to be more widely shared. That custom is changing, a development people are asking for and the koans themselves seem to want. Some people continue to do individual koan study in the traditional way, winding through the entire curriculum in the specified order. Many more encounter koans in group settings like our koan salon, ask a teacher for or are given a koan to work with a specific concern, or have koans land on their heads from a passing dragon cloud. The koan wheel turned again when members of the Awakened Life community developed what they call life-practice conversations, in which a koan or a talk about koans is taken up as a way of addressing immediate personal challenges in the realm of the psyche.

The Miscellaneous is one of the richest resources we have for all these ways of keeping company with koans, and it became hard to justify cutting off everyone from that richness — including those in formal koan study

who are working with a first koan, which can take years to resolve. As a result, these koans are becoming more widely known, and, I'd venture to say, more widely helpful than they've ever been.

While *Gates* is intended to support individual and group koan work in the Pacific Zen School, which includes The Open Source network as well as the Pacific Zen Institute, we're aware that *Gates* is likely to spread beyond those communities. Which poses a question : What happens when these koans float free of koan study as we now understand it? We've discovered that it's good to be one person, holding the koan in meditation ... and it's good to be part of a group of people, setting out our responses as a kind of mosaic of understandings, deepening and brightening each other ... and it's good to have someone, usually a teacher, who can bring ancestral knowledge and the perspective from the other side of the gate each koan offers. We might be finding out what happens when these koans jump free of even the most beautiful of boxes.

All that said, if you'd still prefer to meet the Miscellaneous Koans for the first time in the context of individual formal koan study, please skip the First Gate and go directly to the Second Gate.

A guide to our way of koan study — our way of lifting these words off the page and keeping company with them, which as far as I know is unique to us — can be found in my book *Through Forests of Every Color: Awakening with Koans* (Shambhala, 2022).

These koan gates often seem to appear not on the path ahead of you but as a shimmering presence behind you. They invite you to be surprised, and in that surprise to take a step back, into the vast generosity of the moment just before. Before reaction and habit, certainties and prejudices. Into radiant plains and the night sky. Into the vast generosity of your own heart-mind.

Jeanette Holman
Winter to spring 2013 in
Santa Fe, New Mexico
& 2022 on the California
coast

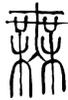


*Dedicated to the ancestors of past, present,
and future, walking the Way together*



*First Gate : Miscellaneous Koans
of the Pacific Zen School*





Stop the sound of that distant temple bell

Put out that fire across the river

Extinguish that star

11001
10011

Stop the dogs barking at midnight



Make the mountains dance ¹

Show me an immovable tree in a heavy wind

Go straight on the narrow mountain road with 99 curves



Count the stars in the sky



Why does the Rio Grande flow south to the sea?

Are dolphins as smart as people say they are?

Does the Loch Ness monster really exist?



All things return to the one. Where does the one return to?



A thousand mountains are covered with snow —
Why is one peak not white?



for a woman : A young boy is coming this way
*for a man : A young girl is coming this way*²



Huanglong Huinan's ³ Three Turning Words ⁴

- 1 How does your hand compare with a buddha's hand?
- 2 How does your leg compare with a donkey's leg?

Checking question : Without attachment to names, show me a buddha's hand.

- 3 Everyone has a birthplace in the world of karma.
What is yours?

In a well no one dug
water ripples from a spring that doesn't flow.
Someone with no shadow or form
is drawing the water.

Ikkyu ⁵



With empty hands
I pick up the hoe

As I walk,
I ride the water buffalo

As I cross the bridge, the bridge flows,
the water is still

Mahasattva Fu ⁶

Dizang asked Fayan, "Where are you going from here?"

Fayan said, "I'm on pilgrimage."

"What sort of thing is pilgrimage?"

"I don't know."

"Not knowing is most intimate."

Fayan suddenly had a great awakening.⁷

In ancient times, Jiang Ziya used to fish by hanging a straight hook without bait three feet above the water. He'd call out, "Fish, if you're desperate to live, come on your own and swallow my hook!"⁸



Taking the form of Guanyin, find shelter
for the homeless person⁹

Stop the war ¹⁰



Save a ghost



You find yourself in a stone crypt. There are no windows and the door is locked from the outside. How will you get out?



You find yourself at the bottom of a very deep dry well.
What do you do?

Save the person stepping out of the 98th-floor window
after the planes hit the Twin Towers



When the Twin Towers fell, what became vividly apparent? ¹¹

Save the Earth



Someone takes you skydiving as a birthday gift. You learn all the safety procedures, but just after you jump you discover that you've put on your backpack rather than a parachute. What do you do?



When the wind blows through the pussy willows
their down floats away

When the rain beats on the pear blossoms
a butterfly takes flight

On Mount Wutai ¹²
a cloud is boiling rice

In front of the ancient buddha hall ¹³
a dog pisses toward heaven

Dongshan ¹⁴

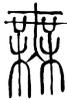
The storehouse of treasures opens by itself. You may take them and use them any way you wish.

Dogen ¹⁵



Officially, not even a needle can enter;
unofficially, you can drive a truck through.

Yangshan



Bodhidharma's remains are in front of the gate. Go get them and bring them here. ¹⁶

Someone comes to you in a dream and asks you why Bodhidharma came from the West. If you don't answer, you neglect your responsibility. What will you say? ¹⁷

Bodhidharma was last seen heading back to India, wearing one sandal. Why did he return to India?



How many steps does it take to get to this room?



Hide in a pillar



Hide in the bell

Manjushri rides on a lion. Samantabhadra rides
on an elephant. What does Shakyamuni ride on? ¹⁸

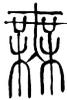


In the sea of Ise,
ten thousand feet down, lies a single stone.
I want to pick up that stone
without wetting my hands. ¹⁹

Here is the stone, inscribed with three lines :

- 1 The top line is a signature
- 2 The right line reads "Cannot get wet"
- 3 The left line reads "Cannot get dry"





This is the stone, drenched with rain
that points the way

Santoka²⁰

The sword that cuts into one

Blow the iron flute with no holes



The stone woman gives birth in the middle of the night ²¹



The stone woman dances the dance of long life,
while the wooden man sings songs of great peace ²²

Someone asked Hongzhi, "What of the ones who've gone?"

Hongzhi said, "White clouds rise to the top of the valleys, blue peaks lean into the empty sky."

"What of the ones who return?"

Hongzhi said, "Heads covered in white hair, they leave the cliffs and valleys. In the dead of night they descend through the clouds to the market stalls."

"What of the ones who neither come nor go?"

"The stone woman calls them back from their dream of the world." ²³

from Sengcan, *Trust in Mind*²⁴

- 1 The greatest way is not difficult if you just don't pick and choose
- 2 If my mind doesn't arise, all things are blameless



from the *Diamond Sutra* ²⁵

- 1 Abiding nowhere, let your heart-mind appear
- 2 All the buddhas and the buddhas' teachings arise from this sutra. *What is this sutra?*



Things Linji says ²⁶

- 1 In your life right now, what is it you lack, what is it that practice must mend?
- 2 There is nothing I dislike
- 3 There is a true person of no rank constantly coming in and out through the gates of your face ²⁷

- 4 There is a solitary brightness without fixed shape or form. It knows how to express the teachings and listen to the teachings. That solitary brightness is you, right here before my eyes.
- 5 Face the world and walk crosswise
- 6 If wherever you are you take the role of host, that place will be a true place



Things are not as they appear, nor are they otherwise

Lankavatara Sutra ²⁸



There is another world and it is inside this one

Paul Eluard

A tree older than the forest it stands in

Hanshan ²⁹



It's like seeing a word you're not familiar with : you don't know its meaning yet, but you recognize the handwriting

Zhaozhou³⁰



Songyuan Chongyue's Three Turning Words ³¹

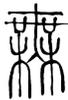
- 1 Why can't a person of great strength lift up her leg?
- 2 Say something without moving your lips or tongue.
- 3 Why can't clear-eyed people cut the blood-red thread? ³²

And what did the rubies say
standing before the juice of pomegranates?

Pablo Neruda
William O'Daly, trans.

Xutang Zhiyu's ³³ Three Barriers ³⁴

- 1 How can an unenlightened person put on clothes made of emptiness?
- 2 If an enlightened person stakes out the plan for a prison on the ground, why can't he escape from it?
- 3 Why is it that someone who can dive into the sea and count the grains of sand is standing on tiptoe on the point of a needle?



Once a woman raised a goose in a bottle. When the goose was grown, she wanted to get it out. How can you get it out without breaking the bottle?

Illegible vertical text

A Double Rapture

Because there is no me
and because I feel how much there is no me

Anna Swir
Milosz & Nathan, trans.

Give me one wild word to follow ...

Terry Tempest Williams



Mujaku was widowed at thirty-two. She couldn't get over her grief and became a nun. She came to the teacher Bukko and asked, "What is Zen?"

Bukko replied, "The heart of the one who asks is Zen; you can't get it from someone else's words."

At that moment a deer at a nearby stream gave a cry. The teacher asked, "Where is that deer?"

The nun listened.

The teacher shouted and asked, "Who hears?"

At these words Mujaku had a flash of understanding and left. At the water pipe from the stream she picked up a lacquered wooden bucket that was full of water. She saw the moon's reflection in it and composed a poem, which she presented to the teacher :

The bucket catches the stream,
and the pure moon behind pines
appears in the water.

Bukko glanced at the poem and said, "Take the *Heart Sutra* and go."

After that, she had interviews with the teacher, coming and being sent away, until in the end the bottom fell out of the bucket, and she presented another poem of this realization :

The bottom fell out of my bucket,
and now there's no water, no moon.

After Mujaku's death, the nun Nyozen of Tokeiji meditated on this poem. When she grasped the essence of Zen, she presented her own poem to her teacher :

The bottom fell out of that humble woman's bucket,
the pale dawn moon caught in the rain puddles. ³⁵

adapted from Trevor Leggett, trans.



One day, Layman Pang and his daughter Lingzhao (Spirit Shining) were out selling bamboo baskets. Coming down off a bridge, he stumbled and fell. When Lingzhao saw this, she ran to her father's side and threw herself to the ground.

"What are you doing?" cried the Layman.

"I saw you fall, so I'm helping," replied Lingzhao.

"Luckily no one was looking," remarked the Layman. ³⁶



Yunyan was making tea. Daowu asked him, "Who are you making tea for?"

Yunyan said, "Someone who wants it."

"Why don't you get her to make it for herself?"

"Fortunately, I'm here to do it." ³⁷



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 himself?”

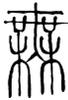
“Because he has no hands.” ³⁸



One time when Dongshan was washing his bowls, he saw two crows fighting over a frog. Someone who also saw this asked, "Why does it come to that?"

Dongshan replied, "It's only for your benefit, honored one."

A woman calls to her servant,
'Little Jade!'
not because she needs something,
but just so her lover will hear her voice. ³⁹



The dewdrop world
is the dewdrop world
And yet
And yet

Issa ⁴⁰



Feed the demons

In the dark, darken further

*Daodejing*⁴¹



When Qiyuan Xinggang ⁴² had a profound opening, her teacher asked, "What was it like when you were gestating the spiritual embryo?"

She replied, "It solidified, deep and solitary."

"When you gave birth, what was that like?"

"Being stripped completely bare."

"What about when you met the Ancestor?"

"I met the Ancestor face to face."

adapted from Beata Grant, trans.

Doushuai's Three Barriers ⁴³

- 1 People poke through the weeds and explore the dark, all in an attempt to see their true nature. Right now, honored one, where is your true nature?
- 2 When you realize self-nature, you're completely free of birth and death. When the light dims in your eyes as you die, how are you free?
- 3 When you're free of birth and death, you know where to go. When your four elements separate, where do you go?

Baling Haojian's Three Turning Words ⁴⁴

- 1 What is Zen? ⁴⁵
A silver bowl filled with snow. ⁴⁶
- 2 What is the way?
A clear-sighted person falls into a well.
- 3 What is the blown-hair sword? ⁴⁷
Each branch of coral holds up the moon. ⁴⁸

History

In ancient Rome there was a festival just before the summer solstice called Vestalia in honor of Vesta, goddess of the hearth, sacred fire, and the earth itself. During the festival, Roman women visited Vesta's round temple, walking barefoot through the city, as though stepping on the older, deeper contours of the land—marsh and field and hill—underneath the paving stones of the streets.

Questions :

- 1 What are the deeper contours of the land?
- 2 How do we walk them?



In a place called Barunga in the Northern Territory of Australia there was a singer named Maralung. The ghost of a master song man called Balanjirri and a bird called Bunggridj-Bunggridj gave Maralung his songs. Balanjirri lived so long ago that nothing of his life is known.

One night Maralung was sleeping, watching a minmin light, which was blue and green and white and fell down across the sky from west to east. (In the outback you see mysterious will o' the wisps, spirit lights called minmin; they have their own creation stories and dreaming, and are also considered dangerous.) Balanjirri and the bird Bunggridj-Bunggridj appeared and set off after the light, following it until they got a song, and then they came back to the camp where Maralung was sleeping. Balanjirri said, "Get up, I have a song to teach you." The dreaming Maralung woke up and the master taught him the song. The bird sang, too. The song was in the ghost language, so humans could sing it but only spirits could understand it.

"Don't lose this song," said Balanjirri. "I sang this song for you. It's yours." He spoke kindly like that.

"All right."

"Okay, you've got to remember it properly, this good song, this minmin light of yours."

Balanjirri and Bunggridj-Bunggridj left and Maralung continued

to sing, but eventually, silly bugger, he fell asleep and forgot the song. He wasn't worried, though; he knew he'd get it, no matter how many times Balanjirri had to repeat it. So the next night Maralung dreamed again and it happened the same way, but this time he remembered the song in the morning.

Questions :

- 1 Where do songs come from?
- 2 Maralung knew the difference between dreaming and waking. So was the master song man really there or not?

adapted from musicologist Allan Marett

11007

Liangshan was Tongan's attendant. Once when he brought Tongan his robe, Tongan asked, "What is that underneath your robe?"

Liangshan didn't know what to say.

Tongan said, "It's so painful when you study the teachings but don't know the answer to that yet. Now you ask me, and I'll tell you."

Liangshan asked, "What's that underneath your robe?"

Tongan said, "Intimate."

Liangshan immediately had a powerful opening. He made prostrations, and tears of gratitude wet his robe.

Tongan asked, "Now that you've had an opening, can you express it?"

Liangshan said that he could. Tongan asked, "What is that underneath your robe?"

Liangshan replied, "Intimate."

Tongan said, "Intimate, intimate."

from Keizan's *Transmission of the Light* ⁴⁹

For whom do you bathe and make yourself beautiful?
The cry of the cuckoo is calling you home.
Hundreds of flowers fall, yet her voice isn't stilled;
even deep in jumbled mountains, it's calling clearly.

attributed to Dongshan

Are you afraid of this happiness? ⁵⁰

Siddhartha Gautama



All — is the price of All —

Emily Dickinson



Baiyun said, "Not yet" ⁵¹



Second Gate : Awakened Life Boans



Grandmotherly Advice



... if your grandmother lives under the sea
in a blue dragon's cave. These really are
precise pointers to the method of no-method.

Outside the meditation hall of Naewonsa
 the snow-covered world
 is Guanyin's robe,
 speaking, like flowing water,
 the Dharma inexpressible by the body,
 inaudible to the body,
 invisible to the body,
 inexpressible by, and inaudible and invisible to, the vastness.
 So who is this wonderful person
 who expresses, hears and sees it?

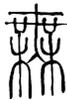
Song'yong
 adapted from Martine Batchelor, trans.



Baizhang asked, "What is the crucial thing about this practice?"

Great Ancestor Ma replied, "It's just the place where you let go of your body and your life."

A student asked Zhaozhou, "What is meditation?"
 "It's not meditation," said Zhaozhou.
 "Why isn't it meditation?"
 "It's alive, it's alive."



Jingshan was sitting with a small group of people, and Dongshan served them tea. Jingshan's eyes were closed, so Dongshan asked, "Where've you gone?"

Jingshan said, "I entered into meditation."

Dongshan said, "There's no door to meditation, so where did you enter from?"



What you really need is simply this : aloneness, great inner solitude, to go within and for hours not to meet anyone. ... The individual person who senses her aloneness, and only she, is like a thing subject to the deep laws, the cosmic laws.

Rainer Maria Rilke
Joan M. Burnham, trans.

Step by step in the dark—
If your foot's not wet, it found the stone

Soyen Shaku



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

Huineng



Quick, don't get ready

John Tarrant

Listen, Shariputra, listen

from Richie's Heart Sutra

Dahui's instructions for working with a koan : Don't take the koan as a statement of truth, nor as something you don't need to do anything about



Jiashan asked a pilgrim, "Where have you come from?"

"From Dongshan's," replied the pilgrim.

"What does Dongshan teach his students?"

"He usually teaches in three ways."

"What are they?"

"The dark way, the bird path, and the open hand."



Someone asked, "What is the inward-and-outward radiance?"
 Yunmen asked back, "Where is your question heading?"
 "What is reaching the light?"
 "If someone suddenly asked you this, what would you say?"
 "How about after reaching the light?"
 Yunmen replied, "Forget the light; first give me the reaching!"



A student asked Baoshou Zhao, "When everything comes forward and overwhelms you, what do you do?"
 Baoshou answered, "Ignore it."
 The student bowed.
 Baoshou then said, "Don't move. If you move it will break you in two at the waist."

Buddha is not the object of our search; do not make Buddha your ideal aim. Do not make Buddha into a reality outside yourself. The image we have in our head of Buddha is not the Buddha. Such a Buddha is a shadow, a ghost, called Ghost Buddha, who can suck up your soul. That is why when we meet Ghost Buddha, we should cut off Ghost Buddha's head.

Linji



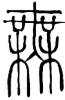
Decorate your own heart,
for the buddha of the flower hall
is nowhere else.

Abbess Yodo-ni, on Buddha's Birthday

Traditional checking questions for this poem :

- 1 How do you recognize your own heart?
- 2 How would you decorate the flower hall?
- 3 If you revere a buddha who is in your own heart,
what do you need with a flower hall?

adapted from Trevor Leggett, trans.



American professor Bernard Phillips asked Zen teacher Hisamatsu Shinichi, "If you follow any way, you will never get there; and if you do not follow any way, you will never get there. So one faces a dilemma."

Hisamatsu replied, "Let that dilemma be your way!"

Let what stands in the way become the way

Marcus Aurelius

You can't light a lamp—there's no oil in the house.
It's a shame to want a light.
I have a way to bless this poverty :
Just feel your way along the wall.

Yinyuan Longqi

When they were laying the foundations for a medieval Japanese temple, the builders discovered a buried stone coffer. Inside was a circular mirror, with the words *en kaku*, 'perfect realization', engraved on the back. So the place was named Enkakuji, the Temple of Perfect Realization.

When asked about this later, a teacher said, "Leave aside for a moment that perfect mirror buried underground. What is the perfect mirror in your hands right now? Try to bring it out of its stone coffer. If you don't get this, the Temple of Perfect Realization won't be built."

adapted from Trevor Leggett, trans.



The Chinese character for 'great' can also be written with an additional dot. In Shinto they say, 'Placing the dot in the center is the secret of Shinto.' Where do you place the dot in Zen?





Shenshan was mending clothes with a needle and thread.

Dongshan asked, "What are you doing?"

Shenshan said, "Mending."

Dongshan asked, "How are you mending?"

Shenshan said, "One stitch is like the next."

Dongshan exclaimed, "We've been traveling together for twenty years now, and you can still say such a thing! How is this possible?"

Shenshan asked, "How do you mend?"

Dongshan said, "As if the whole earth were spewing flames."

Changqing Da'an said, "I have lived on Mount Gui for thirty years, eating [Guishan's] food and shitting [Guishan's] shit, but I did not study [Guishan's] Zen. I simply tended an ox. When the ox left the road and entered the grass I pulled it back with its nose ring; when it entered other people's fields I tamed it with the whip. For some time it has been gentle, amiably accepting my words. Now it has become 'the white bull on the bare ground' and is always before me, showing itself clearly throughout the day. Even if I try to chase it off it doesn't go away."

Thomas Kirchner, trans.

A student asked 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 responded "Yes?," Guishan said, "There, she'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."

adapted from Thomas Kirchner, trans.

The longing is to be pure. What you get is to be changed.

Jorie Graham

Is This a Bad Day? A Good Day?



We're filled with doubt, get our hearts
broken, find ourselves completely stuck,
can't shake old habits. Are we off the path?
Can there be such a thing as off the path?
Are there detours on the Way?



Hating herself for being so stupid and clumsy, Qiyuan Xinggang faced the buddha statue and wept bitterly. Plagued by nightmares, she put her robes on top of her head, knelt in front of the statue, and said, "I've found what I have an affinity for, and I won't let it go." Day and night she labored and toiled but still didn't have a breakthrough. One day, meditating in a dark room, it was as though she caught a glimpse of a white sun, which a moment later was obscured again by clouds.

Not long after, she was listening to a dharma encounter in which her teacher Shiche asked someone what koan she was working on. "Who" was the reply.

Without thinking, Xinggang interrupted, "Who is the one who is asking? Who is the one who's responding? Put on your clothes, eat your meal, and do what you will."

Shiche asked, "Who is the one who lives in peace with the will of heaven?"

Xinggang replied by stamping her foot.

Shiche said, "Red dust rises from the bottom of the sea," and Xinggang bowed.⁵²

adapted from Beata Grant



A belly swollen full of hell,
 countless eons of passions,
 wildfires burning without end—
 but flowering grasses are born again in the spring wind.

Ikkyū
 Stephen Berg, trans.

Touzi said, “You’ve hit a barrier and can’t find your way home. If you go forward you’ll fall into the hands of the angry gods. If you retreat you’ll slip into the hell of the hungry ghosts. If you go neither forward nor backward, you’ll drown in dead water. What do you do?”



Linji asked a nun, "Welcome? Not welcome?"

The nun gave a shout.

Linji held up his stick and said, "Speak, speak!"

The nun gave another shout.

Linji hit her.

Seijo was living alone with her son when she began to study Zen wholeheartedly. Her meditation ripened, and true doubt solidified in her mind. She would meditate all day and forget to cook, so that when her son came home he had nothing to eat. The neighbors took pity on him and fed him.

One day when her son came home, Seijo asked him, "Whose son are you?"

Startled, her son asked, "Mom, have you lost your mind?"

"Yes," she replied.

It went on like this for several days when suddenly she had an opening and went to see Hakuin. He tested her with several stories, and finding that she had no sticking points at all, he gave her his approval.

adapted from *Kahawai Koans*

Muzhou's one-room hermitage was usually closed. When he did occasionally receive visitors, he got straight to the point. When Yunmen could freely roll in and out,⁵³ he went straight to Muzhou's door and knocked.

Muzhou asked, "Who's there?"

"It's me, [Yunmen] Wenyan."

Muzhou blocked the entrance and asked, "Why do you keep coming?"

Yunmen replied, "I'm not clear about myself."

Muzhou said, "Utterly useless stuff!"⁵⁴, pushed Yunmen out, and shut the door. This is how Yunmen had an opening.

adapted from Urs App, trans.



Later, someone asked Yunmen, "What is most urgent for me?"
Yunmen replied, "The very you who is afraid that you don't know!"



Someone asked, "One of the ancestors said that everyone has it, but I'm covered with the red dust of the world and don't know whether I do or not."

Caoshan said, "Show me your hand." Then he pointed to the questioner's fingers: "One, two, three, four, five. Enough!"



Priest Taigen went on pilgrimage to do further study, visiting Priest Gyo. When Taigen was about to leave, Gyo said, "Since I have nothing to give you, I'd like to make this my present." Using fire tongs, he picked up a burning charcoal from the hearth and offered it to Taigen, but Taigen didn't know how to take it. Taigen stamped out and locked himself in one of the rooms there for seven days. Then Taigen again went to Gyo to take his leave, and Gyo did the same thing as before. This time, however, Taigen had no hesitation about how to respond, and Gyo approved it.

A high-ranking samurai was also a serious Zen student. Fighting broke out all over Japan and he was wounded in battle; in spite of the pain he galloped to a temple to see the teacher there. A tea ceremony was going on, and the teacher put a cup in front of him, asking, "How are things?"

The warrior immediately crushed the cup under his foot and said, "Heaven and earth completely broken up."

The teacher asked, "When heaven and earth are broken up, what's that like?"

The warrior stood with his hands crossed over his chest. The teacher hit him, and he involuntarily cried out from the pain of his wounds.

The teacher said, "Heaven and earth not quite broken up yet."

adapted from Trevor Leggett, trans.



Just fail better.

Samuel Beckett

In the Presence of Each Other



*The world, in the shape of a particular
someone or something, calls and we respond.
We call and receive a response.
In these small moments the world awakens,
the world becomes intimate.*



The air and the earth interpenetrated in the warm gusts of spring; the soil was full of sunlight, and the sunlight full of red dust. The air one breathed was saturated with earthy smells, and the grass under foot had a reflection of the blue sky in it.

Willa Cather

A student asked, "What is the heart-mind of the ancient buddhas?"

The teacher replied, "Flowering groves. Forests of many colors."

Yunmen asked a student, "What have you been up to?"

"I was talking to a rock."

"Did the rock respond?"

The student didn't know what to say, so Yunmen answered for him, "The rock was nodding to you before you even spoke."



Lingyun was wandering in the mountains and became lost in his walking. He rounded a bend and suddenly saw a peach tree in full bloom on the other side of the valley. This awakened him. Later, the Japanese teacher Keizan wrote :

The village peach blossoms
 didn't know their own pink,
 but still they freed Lingyun
 from all his doubts



Keizan also asked, "Lingyun was awakened by peach blossoms, so why didn't he become the successor to peach blossoms?"



There was a woman who kept the pilgrims' inn at Hara under Mt. Fuji. Her name is unknown, and it's not known when she was born or died.

Checking question : What is her name?

She once went to hear a talk by Hakuin, who said, "The Pure Land is your heart-mind itself, Amida is your own body."⁵⁵ Once Amida appears, mountains, rivers, earth, plants, trees, and forests all shine with a great light. If you want to see this, look into your own heart. Since the Pure Land is your heart-mind itself, what kind of extraordinary features would it have? Since Amida is your own body, what kind of distinguishing marks would it have?"

When she heard this, the woman said to herself, "This isn't so hard." Returning home, she meditated day and night, asking these questions while awake and asleep. One day, as she was washing a pot, she had a sudden breakthrough. She tossed the pot aside and rushed to see Hakuin. She said, "I've run across Amida in my own body, and everything on earth is shining with a great light. It's wonderful!" She danced for joy.

Checking question : Who is that Amida?

Hakuin said, "So you say, but what about a cesspool—does it shine with a great light, too?"

The woman went up to him and slapped him, saying, "You still don't get it, you old fart." Hakuin roared with laughter.

Checking question : Why?

adapted from *Kahawai Koans*



In China, people of the Way used to greet each other saying, "I am not certain."



Someone asked, "What is the pure, untouched sangha?"

Zhaozhou said, "A young virgin."

"What are the people in the sangha?"

"The virgin is pregnant."

What is it I interchange so suddenly with strangers?
 What gives me to be free to a woman's and man's good-will?
 What gives them to be free
 to mine?

Walt Whitman



If you use it on the road—like a dragon finding water, a tiger at home in the mountains—when you meet a person of understanding you discern what’s right for the occasion and what would be a mistake, and together you witness each other’s illumination.

Yuanwu

Each being's eternal radiance appears before you. Each being is an 8,000-foot precipice.

Miaozong



In the old days there were sixteen bodhisattvas who, when it was time to bathe, entered the bath together. They suddenly realized the cause of water and said, "This subtle touch releases the brightness. We have become the sons and daughters of the Buddha." ⁵⁶



In medieval Japan, women's access to the great teaching temple of Enkakujji was restricted, and they were tested for their realization at the gate. A nun named Yoshihime, whose nickname was Demon Girl, presented herself at the gate for work in the room. The gatekeeper demanded, "What is the gate through which the buddhas come into the world?"

Yoshihime shoved his head between her legs, saying, "Look! Look!"

The gatekeeper said, "In the middle is the fragrance of wind and dew."

Yoshihime said, "You're not fit to keep the gate; you ought to be toiling in the garden."

The gatekeeper ran to the temple and reported this to the abbot's attendant, who said, "Let's go down and test this."

The same dialogue was repeated, except that when Yoshihime said, "Look! Look!", the attendant replied, "The buddhas of the three worlds come giving light."

Yoshihime said, "This one has an eye; he saw the 84,000 gates thrown open all at once."

Traditional checking questions :

- 1 Say the password so that Yoshihime can enter the gate.
- 2 Sweep aside the iron door that bars you.
- 3 What is the gate through which the buddhas come into the world?
- 4 How do you see the 84,000 gates?
- 5 I'm not asking about the buddhas of the three worlds coming with light — How do you give light right now?

adapted from Trevor Leggett, trans.



When Bodhidharma died, Emperor Wu wrote an inscription for his monument : "What a shame! I saw him without seeing him, I met him without meeting him; I still regret this deeply."

In my longing for the Way,
I often sought her out these past twelve years,
and, as the seasons passed,
came to know her face from different angles.
Now, out of the blue, the precious mountain topples,
and compassion's boat overturns in the sea of samsara.
Though the iron flute grows faint,
the lamp of Chan is handed down
from one generation to the next.

Yikui Chaochen, on the death of her aunt & mentor
adapted from Beata Grant, trans.



Once Xuefeng and Yantou were traveling on Tortoise Mountain when they got snowed in at an inn. Yantou spent the entire time sleeping, while Xuefeng spent each day sitting in meditation.

One day, Xuefeng called out, "Elder Brother! Elder Brother! Get up!"

Yantou asked, "What is it?"

Xuefeng said, "Don't be lazy. As pilgrims, profound knowledge is our companion and should accompany us at all times. But all you do is sleep."

Yantou yelled back, "Just eat your fill and sleep! Sitting there in meditation all the time, you're like a clay bodhisattva statue in someone's hut. You're just going to spook the villagers."

Xuefeng pointed to his chest and said, "I feel uneasy here, and I'm afraid of cheating myself."

Yantou said, "I've always said that someday you'll build a cottage on a lonely mountaintop and convey a great teaching, and yet you talk like this!"

"I'm truly anxious."

"If that's really so, share your understanding with me, and where it's true I'll confirm it for you; where it's not true we'll root it out."

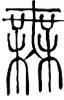
Xuefeng told Yantou of three incidents when he felt he had an opening through listening to what someone else said.

Yantou responded, "Haven't you heard that what comes in through the front gate isn't the family treasure?"

"Then what should I do?"

Yantou said, "If you want to convey a great teaching, it has to flow out from your own breast to cover heaven and earth."

When Xuefeng heard this he experienced a profound awakening. He bowed and said, "Elder Brother, today on Tortoise Mountain I've finally attained the Way!"



Layman Pang asked Qifeng, "Do you know how far it is from here to the mountaintop?"⁵⁷

Qifeng said, "I'm not sure you can really get there from here."

Pang said, "If it were so awfully steep and treacherous, I wouldn't ask about it."

"You tell me how far it is, then."

"One, two, three ..."

"Four, five, six ..."

"Why not seven?"

"You say seven, then I'll say eight."

"You made it to the top!"

"I've finally amounted to something!"

Laughing, Pang and Qifeng went for a walk together.

adapted from James Green, trans.

The Gans, a family of working folks, practiced the vow of Samantabhadra, the bodhisattva of skillful action, and all—mother, father, daughter—entered the Way. They invited the Chan teacher Yantou to spend the summer in their home. One day as Yantou was mending his robe, Mr. Gan returned from work and stood next to him. Yantou pricked Gan with his needle, and Gan immediately awakened. He went off to his room laughing, then put on a robe and bowed to Yantou in thanks.

His daughter saw all this and asked, “What are you laughing at?”

Gan said, “Don’t ask.”

Mrs. Gan said, “If it’s something good, everyone should know.”

So Mr. Gan told what happened, and Mrs. Gan instantly awakened.

She said, “After thirty years, from now on whenever I drink water it’ll fill my throat.”

Their daughter, listening to all this from the sidelines, also instantly awakened.

adapted from *Kahawai Koans*

Why should we wander in the mountains with these guys now?
Well, I'm not saying there won't be anyone like them after a
hundred or even a thousand years, but there won't be many.

Xuedou



The bright road that the ancestors knew is right in front of you
in everything you see and hear.

Yuanwu



The Buddha's teaching was straight; why is it that the ancestors sing such a crooked tune?



Nanquan asked his assembly, "Tomorrow we will pay homage to Great Ancestor Ma. Do you think he'll return?"

When nobody else responded, young Dongshan came forward and said, "He'll come as soon as he has a companion."



A frustrated student begged Guishan, "Just tell me!"
 Guishan replied, "If I told you, later on you would resent me." ⁵⁸



One day the poet Huang Tingjian was visiting his teacher Huitang. Huitang said, "You know the passage in which Confucius says, 'My friends, do you think I'm hiding things from you? In fact, I'm hiding nothing from you.' It's just the same with the Great Matter of Chan. Do you understand?"

"I don't," Huang replied.

Later Huitang and Huang were walking in the mountains, where the air was filled with the scent of sweet-olive blossoms. Huitang asked, "Do you smell that fragrance?"

Huang said, "I do."

Huitang said, "See, I'm hiding nothing from you."

adapted from Thomas Kirchner, trans.

Jingqing said about a conversation with one of his students, "One drop is just black ink. Two drops and a dragon is born."⁵⁹



The chick breaks out, the hen breaks in —
 The chick awakens, and the shell is gone.
 Forgetting who's chick and who's hen,
 they respond completely to whatever happens.
 Together on the path, chanting in harmony,
 walking alone through the wonderful mystery.

Xiangyan

Yuanwu didn't think that his teacher Fayuan appreciated him, and he left in anger. Fayuan called after him, "Think of me when you are ill with fever."

Soon afterwards, Yuanwu did become gravely ill. When he recovered, he returned to study with Fayuan, and, after years of training, Yuanwu became Fayuan's dharma heir.



Someone asked Dongshan, "Do you agree with what your teacher taught?"

Dongshan replied, "I agree with half and with half I don't."

"Why don't you agree completely?"

"If I agreed completely, I'd be ungrateful to my teacher."



As Guishan the teacher and Yangshan the student were strolling together outside the monastery, a crow flew past with a persimmon in its beak and dropped the fruit in front of them. Guishan picked it up and passed it to Yangshan, who, after washing the fruit in water, returned it to his teacher. Guishan asked, "What do you mean by this?"

Yangshan replied, "This is the reward for your great goodness."

Guishan said, "But you shouldn't come away empty-handed," and he gave half of the fruit to Yangshan.⁶⁰

A Little Philosophy



If you ask for philosophy, the koans will give you stories. Here it all is : immersion in the world, the miraculous functioning of things, karma, passions, picking and choosing, form and emptiness ...



A teacher said to a student, "You must be full of this realization not only in meditation, but also in daily life. It's like filling a sieve with water."

After the student thought about this for some time, the teacher gave her a sieve and a cup and they went to the nearby seashore, where they stood on a rock with the waves breaking around them.

"Show me how you fill the sieve with water," the teacher said to the student. She bent down and scooped the water into the sieve with the cup. It was barely visible in the bottom of the sieve before it was gone.

"How would you do it?" she asked.

The teacher took the sieve from her hand and threw it far out into the sea, where it floated for a moment and then sank. "Now it's full of water," the teacher said.



A coin lost in the river is found in the river

Yunmen

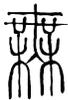
Magu, Nanquan, and another monastic went to call on the teacher Jingshan. On the way they met a woman whom they asked, "Which way is the road to Jingshan?"

She said, "Right straight ahead."

"Where do you live, ma'am?"

"I'm right here."

The monastics went to her shop, where the woman made a pot of tea and brought out three cups. She said to them, "Oh monks, let those of you with miraculous powers drink tea." As the three looked at each other, the woman said, "Watch this decrepit old woman show my own miraculous power." Then she poured the tea into the cups and left.



Baoche of Mt. Mayu was fanning himself. A student approached and said, "The nature of wind is eternal and there's no place it doesn't reach. Why, then, do you fan yourself?"

"Although you understand that the nature of the wind is eternal," Baoche replied, "You don't understand the meaning of its reaching everywhere."

"What does reaching everywhere mean?" asked the student. Baoche just kept fanning himself. The student bowed deeply.

adapted from Andy Ferguson, trans.



Haoyue asked Changsha, "An ancient sage once said, 'With awakening, karmic obstructions are fundamentally empty; without awakening, past debts must be paid.' Why then did Aryasimha and the Second Ancestor have to pay their debts?"⁶¹

Changsha answered, "Venerable monk, you don't understand what 'fundamentally empty' means."

"What is fundamental emptiness?"

"Karmic obstruction itself."

"What is karmic obstruction?"

"Fundamental emptiness itself."

adapted from Thomas Kirchner, trans.



Zhaozhou said, "Buddhahood is passion and passion is Buddhahood."

Someone asked, "In whom does the Buddha cause passion?"

Zhaozhou replied, "The Buddha causes passion in all of us."

"How do we get rid of it?"

"Why should we get rid of it?"



A student asked Wuming, "Sengcan said, 'The greatest way is not difficult if you just don't pick and choose.' Then how can you delight in eating cucumbers but refuse to take even one bite of a carrot?"

Wuming said, "I love cucumbers; I hate carrots!"

The student lurched back as though struck by lightning. Then, laughing, sobbing, and dancing around, he exclaimed, "Liking cucumbers and hating carrots isn't difficult; just stop preferring the greatest way!"



Someone asked, "What is my heart-mind?"

An ancestor replied, "All the worlds in the universe are your heart-mind."

"If that's so, then there's really no particular place for my body to be."

"That's exactly the place for your body to be."

"Where is that?"

"The great ocean, vast and deep."

"I don't understand."

"Dragons and fish play freely, leaping and diving."

adapted from Andy Ferguson, trans.

The Dawn of a Fortunate Day



A spring beyond time, and flowers bloom on a withered tree
Riding backwards on a jade elephant, you chase a winged deer
Now, as you hide beyond mountains without end
The white moon, a cool breeze, the dawn of a fortunate day

"Achievement", attributed to Dongshan



The ogre outside shoves the door,
 the ogre inside holds it fast.
 Dripping sweat from head to tail
 and battling for their lives,
 they keep it up throughout the night.
 Until at last when the dawn appears
 their laughter fills the early light —
 they were friends from the first.

Hakuin
 Norman Waddell, trans.





...the instant that crow laughed
 a hearer rose up from the ordinary dust.
 In this morning's sunshine
 an illuminated face sings.

Ikkyu

Asan concentrated deeply and sincerely on Zen. One day during her morning meditation she heard a rooster crow, and her mind suddenly opened. She said :

Fields, mountains, flowers, and my body, too
 are the bird's voice —
 What's left that could be called a hearer?

adapted from *Kahawai Koans*

Suddenly I realized for myself the fresh breeze that rises up
when the great burden is laid down

Fayan



Nothing to stand on
no place to fall

Cloud Dragon



Since before anyone remembers
 it's been clear
 shining like silver
 though the moonlight suffuses it
 and the wind ruffles it
 no trace of either remains
 Now I wouldn't dare
 to explain the secret
 of the stream bed
 but I can tell you
 that the blue dragon
 is coiled there

Muso Soseki
 adapted from Merwin & Shigematsu, trans.



Guishan was asked, “Does someone who has attained enlightenment still need to continue with self-cultivation?”

Guishan said, “Through meditation students can attain thought that is no-thought, suddenly awaken, and realize their original nature. But there are still delusions that have accumulated over numberless ages and can’t be purified in a single moment. And so students should be taught how to eliminate karmic tendencies and mental habits. There’s no other way of cultivation.”



When the regent Tokimune received the news that the Mongol armada was poised to invade Japan, he went in full armor to see his teacher and said, "The great thing has come."

The teacher asked, "Is there any way to avoid it?"

Tokimune calmly stamped his feet, shook his whole body, and gave a tremendous shout.

The teacher said, "A real lion cub, a real lion roar. Run straight ahead, and don't look to either side!"

After the defeat of the Mongols, Tokimune built a great temple, where he installed an image of Jizo-of-a-Thousand-Forms, the guide through the underworld. There he organized a religious service for the souls of the dead on both sides.

adapted from Trevor Leggett, trans.

Yunmen said, "See how vast and wide the world is. Why do you put on your clothes at the sound of the morning bell?"



It helps you cross the river when the bridge is broken. It's your companion as you return to the village on a moonless night.

Wumen, speaking about his staff

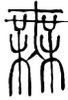


Someone asked Dahui, "What's it like when mind and buddha are both forgotten?"

Dahui replied, "The sun revealed in the hands of an old woman selling fans."

Praise this world to the angel

Rainer Maria Rilke
Stephen Mitchell, trans.



I have been in that heaven the most illumined
By light from God, and seen things which to utter
One who returns has neither skill nor knowledge;
For as it nears the object of its yearning
Our intellect is overwhelmed so deeply
It can never retrace the path that it followed.
But whatsoever of the holy kingdom
Was in the power of memory to treasure
Will be my theme until the song is ended.

Dante



Notes

Joan Sutherland



¹ This is the enlightenment koan of the Japanese *yamabushi*, mountain-dwelling ascetics and mystics who follow the esoteric tradition called Shugendo. When they can see Zao Gongen, a shamanic-buddhist guardian deity of the mountains, dancing as the mountains, they've awakened.

² The original formulation of this koan is : *Is that Older Sister or Younger Sister coming this way?* Most Westerners don't customarily address family members and intimates like this so the honorifics got stripped out, but there's something important in the original version about how our minds sometimes react when faced with the question of picking and choosing.

³ Huanglong was an 11th-century Chan teacher in the Linji (Jap. Rinzai) lineage. He once said, "If you leave home to follow the Way you must have courage and dedication, cut off your second head [full of preconception, judgment, and opinion], and practice in solitude in the house of the self. But eventually you have to throw open the door, get rid of the possessions of that self, and receive and meet whatever comes, helping any in need. In this way the deep compassion of the Buddha can in some small measure be repaid."

⁴ A turning word or phrase works in two ways. First, it demonstrates that someone's attention is turned toward the true nature of things ("Say a turning word and I'll stay," said the nun True World to the hermit Judi), and second, it can turn someone else's attention there, too, catalyzing an opening ("At these words, she found an entrance to the Way.")

⁵ Ikkyu Sojun (1394-1481) was a great Japanese teacher and poet who wrote with openness about his erotic life and other sensual pleasures, contrasting them favorably with the deadness of institutional Zen; this poem shows the mysterious beauty of his enlightenment.

⁶ These six lines are a poem attributed to Mahasattva Fu (Jap. Fu Daishi); we treat each couplet as a separate koan || Mahasattva is a Sanskrit title meaning Great Being || Fu was a Chinese farmer of the 5th-6th centuries; because of his deep realization and generosity to those in need, he was considered a manifestation of Maitreya, the buddha to come

⁷ Dizang (9th-10th cents), whose name means Earth Treasury, was a clear-speaking Chan teacher who transmitted esoteric teachings || Fayen (10th cent) founded the last of the five great Chan schools of the classical era and introduced the use of koans in teaching

⁸ Jiang Ziya was considered the greatest strategist of the tumultuous time it took the Zhou dynasty to overthrow the Shang dynasty, about three thousand years ago. While on break from serving emperors and rebels, he spent his time fishing. Later he was taken into the Daoist pantheon, and his fishing strategy into the koans.

⁹ Guanyin (Skt. Avalokiteshvara, Jap. Kannon or Kanzeon) is the bodhisattva of compassion

¹⁰ This koan, sadly, has many different versions depending on the war(s) being waged at the time; it's helpful to consider a

specific war rather than war in the abstract

¹¹ This koan is adapted from one in the *Gateless Gateway*, which asks : If you take the wheels and axles off a cart, what becomes vividly apparent?

¹² Mt. Wutai is one of Chan's sacred mountains and a place of pilgrimage; it's where Manjushri lives and many supernatural events occur

¹³ The buddha hall is the building in a monastery complex where statues of buddhas and bodhisattvas are enshrined

¹⁴ These four lines are from a poem by Dongshan, the 9th-century Chan teacher whom the Caodong (Jap. Soto) school claims as their founder. He had a lyrical turn of mind and was said to teach three roads : the bird path, the dark way, and the open hand.

¹⁵ From Dogen's *Fukan Zazengi*, 'Recommending Meditation to Everyone'. Dogen was the 13th-century Zen genius who went to China and brought the Caodong (Soto) teachings back to Japan. Although he emphasized *shikantaza* (just sitting), he also practiced and taught koan study.

¹⁶ Bodhidharma is the Indian monk who is said to have brought the meditation (Dhyana/Chan/Zen) school to China in around 500 CE; he's often referred to as the First Ancestor. He began the Chan revolution by focusing on directly seeing the true nature of the heart-mind in order to awaken. Legend says

that Bodhidharma was tall, red-bearded, blue-eyed, pierced, tattooed, and possessed of a fierce glare, so he was also called The Barbarian. (That Chan's First Ancestor is a barbarian who was sent to China by Prajnatara, a woman teacher, is probably important.)

¹⁷ "Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?" means Why did Bodhidharma make the perilous journey from India to China, bringing the teachings with him? It's a common way of asking about Chan's meaning or intention

¹⁸ Manjushri is the bodhisattva of wisdom, Samantabhadra the bodhisattva of skillful action, & Shakyamuni the historical buddha

¹⁹ This is a verse from an old Japanese folksong; the Shrine at Ise (pronounced "ee-say") is the most sacred site of Shinto, Japan's indigenous, pre-buddhist religion

²⁰ Santoka Taneda (Japan, 1882-1940) had a turbulent life as a haiku poet and itinerant Zen priest

²¹ The stone woman who gives birth comes from an ancient myth about the Lady of Tu Mountain, who turned to stone and then cracked open to give birth. Colloquially a stone woman came to mean one who can't bear children, but in the koans she's an image of the fertile vastness.

²² Colloquially a wooden man is a marionette or a scarecrow, but in the koans he's also an image of the vastness

²³ Hongzhi Zhengjue (12th cent) was the compiler of the *Book*

of *Serenity* and the leading proponent of silent illumination, which became the foundation of Caodong (Soto) practice

²⁴ From Third Ancestor Sengcan's *Trust in Mind* (*Xinxinming*, 6th cent), a foundational Chan text that had a strong influence on the koan tradition

²⁵ The *Diamond* (Skt. *Vajracchedika*) *Sutra* is part of the Prajnaparamita literature, which serves as the philosophical foundation of much of the Mahayana. The sutra was considered as sharp as a diamond that cuts away conceptual thought to bring people to enlightenment.

²⁶ Linji (9th cent) is one of the great early figures of the school that bears his name, which is associated with koan study. His words are fierce, direct, and profoundly encouraging.

²⁷ Once someone asked Linji who the true person of no rank is; Linji grabbed him and cried, "Speak, speak!"

²⁸ The *Lankavatara Sutra*, a Mahayana text translated into Chinese in the 5th century, had a strong influence on Chan and the koan tradition. It focuses on the nature of consciousness, the idea that our heart-minds are continuous with the world, and the relationship between our individual minds and fundamental Mind.

²⁹ This is from a poem by Hanshan (Cold Mountain), the *nom de plume* of one or more Tang dynasty hermit-poets; Hanshan is the embodiment of the seeker who renounces the world and goes off to live in the wilderness, recording spiritual experiences in poems

³⁰ Zhaozhou (9th cent) is one of the geniuses of the koan tradi-

tion; he didn't settle down to teach until he was 80, but fortunately he lived to 120. He was a man of few but brilliantly clear words; people said a light played around his mouth when he spoke.

³¹ Songyuan (12th cent) is a direct ancestor, through Hakuin, in our own lineage. He once said, "To realize the Way with complete clarity, there is one essential thing you can't avoid and must come to understand : the red thread of passions that cannot be severed. Face it directly and without hesitation, for how else can liberation come?"

³² The red thread is an old Chinese image; originally it referred to a woman's vulva, and in the koans came to mean the world of birth, death, sex, blood, passions, etc. || The Japanese also call it the line of tears

³³ Xutang (13th cent) was a calligrapher as well as the Chan teacher who taught Nampo Jomyo, the founder of the Japanese Rinzai school; he edited a famous koan collection known as the *Kido Koans* after the Japanese pronunciation of his name

³⁴ Some koan questions are called 'barriers' after Chinese structures that are barriers when closed but gates when open—for example, gates at boundaries such as those in the Great Wall

³⁵ This story took place in medieval Japan and comes from a book by Trevor Leggett, published as *Kamakura Koans* or *Samurai Zen*; about a quarter of the collection involves women

³⁶ The Pang family (8th cent) represents a Chinese ideal of enlightened householder life—full of humor, materially simple, both devoted to practice and engaged with the world, constantly

discussing the teachings among themselves and with others, deeply and unashamedly eccentric

³⁷ Daowu and Yunyan (8th-9th cents) were close friends when they studied together; their exchanges became famous, and from their lineages came many of the great schools and teachers of subsequent generations

³⁸ It's clear how much Dongshan was Yunyan's heir. When Dongshan was leaving, Yunyan said, "If you leave, it will be difficult for us to see each other again." Dongshan replied, "It will be difficult for us not to see each other."

³⁹ This is a verse from an old Chinese folksong; the Song dynasty teacher Wuzu said about it, "That is so much like Chan."

⁴⁰ The dewdrop world is an image of life's transience and insubstantiality || Issa (Japan, 1763-1827), haiku poet and Pure Land priest, wrote this poem on the death of his beloved young daughter

⁴¹ The *Daodejing* (Tao Te Ching) is the first classic of Daoism, attributed to Laozi (Lao Tzu), c. 500 BCE, making him the Buddha's contemporary

⁴² Qiyuan Xinggang (17th cent) was a teacher in the Linji line, one of the few Chan women teachers whose biography has come down to us; you can read about her in Beata Grant's *Eminent Nuns*

⁴³ Doushuai (11th cent) was a koan master who stepped down from teaching to deepen his practice and then died young, leaving

no successors. When he created these barriers, it's as though there were some breeze from eternity he could feel on his skin.

⁴⁴ Baling (10th cent) was one of Yunmen's successors. Yunmen asked Baling these three questions, and these are his answers. Yunmen responded, "After I die, just repeat these three turning phrases on my remembrance day and you'll have repaid me fully."

⁴⁵ Literally, 'What is the school of Kanadeva?' Kanadeva was an Indian Buddhist philosopher and successor of the great Nagarjuna, and the whole school of Chan/Zen was sometimes called after him

⁴⁶ A quote from the beginning of Dongshan's poem 'Jewel-Mirror Samadhi'

⁴⁷ The blown-hair sword is one so sharp that it will cut a single hair blown against it

⁴⁸ In Chinese folk belief, coral branches grow under the influence of the moon and have a halo of light around them

⁴⁹ Tongan and Liangshan (no dates for either) were Caodong teachers of the classical period || Keizan was in Dogen's line; his lyrical *Transmissions of the Light* records an unbroken line of succession from the Buddha to his own time in medieval Japan, and should be considered as much myth as history

⁵⁰ When Siddhartha Gautama had nearly starved himself to death practicing harsh austerities, he remembered a golden

moment from his childhood when he was tucked under a rose-apple tree and, for awhile, left alone. With nothing on his mind but green grasses, warm sun, and the shade of the tree, there was no resistance, no tension, and no craving; everything was complete. As he wondered whether this, rather than radical asceticism, might be the path to awakening, a voice rose inside him and asked, “Are you afraid of this happiness?” Able to answer *No*, he went to sit under the bodhi tree and stood up awhile later as the Buddha.

⁵¹ Baiyun was an 11th century Chan master, but beyond that we’ll let the words stand on their own

⁵² The world of our ordinary lives is called the red dust world || The sea is often a symbol of the vastness

⁵³ A Chan expression for an accomplished practitioner, one who can demonstrate the unity of all phenomena in one (rolling in), and the manifestation of the one in all phenomena (rolling out)

⁵⁴ Literally, ‘stone drills from the Qin era’, gigantic drills intended for the construction of the Qin emperor’s huge palace in the 3rd century BCE; this grandiose project was never realized, so the drills stand for something completely useless

⁵⁵ The Pure Land is a paradise in which those who revere Amida (Skt. Amitabha, Ch. Amituo), the Buddha of Infinite Light, hope to be reborn; practitioners constantly chant the *nembutsu*, ‘Namu Amida Butsu’ || Hakuin often tried to show Pure Land followers the zen perspective on paradises and buddhas

⁵⁶ This is a story from the *Surangama Sutra* : At an assembly, twenty-five bodhisattvas tell their enlightenment stories. In addition to these sixteen who were awakened through touch, others, like Guanyin, were awakened by hearing, and others through seeing, smelling, tasting, and thinking.

⁵⁷ Layman Pang is playing with Qifeng's name, which means 'reaching the mountaintop'

⁵⁸ The frustrated student was Xiangyan, who couldn't answer Guishan's question about his original face before his parents were born. When Guishan wouldn't 'give' him the answer, explaining that his response could never be Xiangyan's, Xiangyan went off to live by himself and tend the neglected tomb of a famous ancestor. One day, as he was sweeping the courtyard, his broom sent a stone flying, and it struck a bamboo stalk with a vivid *tock!* Xiangyan had a profound opening. He bathed, lit incense, and bowed in the direction of Guishan's monastery, saying, "If he'd told it to me when I asked him, I'd never have experienced this great joy."

⁵⁹ When a dragon is drawn, inking in the pupils brings the dragon to life

⁶⁰ Yangshan (9th cent) and his teacher Guishan were the founders of the Guiyang School, one of the five great houses of the classical period. They had a deep and intimate relationship, and their house was known as the School of Equals. Yangshan was the holder of an esoteric practice involving sacred symbols and gestures, hints of which appear in a few koans.

⁶¹ Both were killed and their deaths ascribed to their evil karma



cosmic loom



ancestor



dark
mysterious



heart mind



emptiness



gateway

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