

KOANS FOR THE GREAT AUTUMN SESSHIN OCTOBER 2002

A monk asked Yunmen, "When the tree withers and the leaves fall, what's happening?"

Yunmen replied, "It's revealing the golden wind."

[Golden Wind is the name of the deity of autumn.]

Shishuang said, "Stop! Become barren autumn ground! Have one thought for ten thousand years. Be a cold dead tree. Be an empty old incense pot. Be a blank strip of white silk."

Save a ghost.

In the ninth month (of the year 1127), Hongzhi visited the people he knew and said his farewells. On the seventh day of the tenth month he returned to his monastery in the mountains. In the early hours of the next morning, the master bathed and changed his clothes. He then sat upright and bade his monks farewell, too. He asked his assistants for a brush and wrote a letter to the Zen Master Dahui of Ayuwang Temple, asking him to take care of his final affairs.

He then wrote a verse:

Flowers in a dream,

Sixty-seven years,

A white bird disappears in the smoke,

Autumn waters touch the sky.

He threw down the brush and died.

Dogen said, "The storehouse of treasures opens by itself. Take them and use them any way you wish."

Shoushan said to his assembly, "If you get it in the first sentence, you will be the teacher of buddhas and ancestors. If you get it in the second sentence, you will be the teacher of humans and gods. If you get it in the third sentence, you cannot even save yourself."

A monk asked, "When did you get it?"

Shoushan said, "The moon sets at midnight, and I walk alone through the town."

Baoning recited a verse to the monks:

A cold autumn wind

drones in the pines.

The Wayward traveler

thinks of her home.

"Who is the traveler? Where is her home?" After a long pause, Baoning said, "There's soup and rice in the meditation hall."

Dongshan's Five Modes: Arriving within Concurrence

Not falling into being or non-being – who can be in accord with this?
Everyone longs to leave the eternal flux,
not just to live in harmony, but to return and sit by the charcoal fire.

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

When you have realized your nature, you are free of birth and death. When the light of your eyes falls [when you die], how are you free?

When you have freed yourself from birth and death, you will know where to go. After your body has separated into the four elements, where do you go?

Blue Cliff Record, Case 18: The National Teacher's Seamless Tomb

Emperor Suzong asked Huizhong, the National Teacher, "After a hundred years [after you have died], what do you want me to do?"

"Build a seamless tomb for this old monk," replied the National Teacher.

"I ask the National Teacher, please show me the design of the tomb," said the Emperor.

The National Teacher sat quietly for awhile and then asked, "Do you understand?"

"I do not understand," replied the Emperor.

"I have a Dharma successor, Danyuan," said the National Teacher. "Please send for him and ask him about it." After the National Teacher's death, the Emperor sent for Danyuan and asked him what was his teacher's idea. Danyuan said:

"South of Xiang, north of Tan.

(Xuedou: The single palm of the hand does not make a sound in vain.)

Within it there is gold that fills the land.

(Xuedou: A natural staff without artificial work.)

Beneath the shadowless tree, a ferry boat.

(Xuedou: The sea is calm, the river is clear.)

In the crystal palace, there is no intellect.

(Xuedou: The teisho is finished.)

Blue Cliff Record, Case 41: Zhaozhou's Great Death

Zhaozhou asked Touzi, "What if a person who was truly dead comes back to life? How would you treat that person?"

Touzi replied, "I don't admit walking about in darkness. Come back in the daylight!"

Blue Cliff Record, Case 55: Daowu's Condolences

Daowu and Jianyuan went to a house to express condolences. Jianyuan rapped on the coffin and asked, "Living or dead?"

Daowu said, "I can't say either living or dead."

Jianyuan asked, "Why can't you say?"

Daowu said, "I can't say! I can't say!"

On the way home, Jianyuan said, "Your Reverence, please tell me right away. If you don't, I shall hit you."

Daowu said, "If you like, I'll allow you to hit me, but I'll never say." Jianyuan hit him.

Later, after Daowu passed away, Jianyuan went to Shishuang and told him this story. Shishuang said, "Alive, I can't say! Dead, I can't say!"

Jianyuan asked, "Why can't you say?"

Shishuang said, "I can't say! I can't say!" With these words, Jianyuan was enlightened.

One day, Jianyuan appeared in the lecture hall with a hoe and walked from East to West and from West to East.

Shishuang asked, "What are you doing?"

Jianyuan said, "I am seeking the sacred bones of our late master."

Shishuang said, "On the billows of the great ocean, whitecaps swell to the sky. What do you search for as our teacher's sacred bones, other than that?"

(Xuedou: Alas, alas!)

Jianyuan said, "That is good for my training."

Fu of Taiyuan said, "The sacred bones of our late master still exist."