

Bodhisattva Way Koans Spring 2009

Nanquan Kills the Cat

One day at Nanquan's, monks of the eastern and western halls were arguing over a cat. When he saw this, Nanquan held up the cat and said, "If you can say something that matters, I won't cut it in two." No one could respond, so Nanquan cut the cat in two.

That evening, Zhaozhou returned from a trip and Nanquan questioned him about what had happened. Zhaozhou took off his sandal, put it on top of his head, and walked out. Nanquan said, "If you had been here, you would have been able to save the cat."



History

Rooted in my history, am I my history alone?

from the *Mahabharata*



Food and Water

Xuefeng said, "Someone sitting next to a basket of food is starving to death, and someone sitting by a river is dying of thirst."

Xuansha commented, "Someone sitting in a basket of food is starving to death, and someone up to her head in water is dying of thirst."

Yunmen said, "Her whole body is food. Her whole body is water."



Love

Love yourself. Then forget it. Then, love the world.

Mary Oliver

The Gates of Paradise

A soldier named Nobushige came to Hakuin and asked, "Is there really a paradise and a hell?"

"Who are you?" inquired Hakuin.

"I am a samurai," the warrior replied.

"You, a soldier!" exclaimed Hakuin. "What kind of ruler would have you as his guard? Your face looks like a beggar's."

Nobushige became so angry that he began to draw his sword, but Hakuin continued, "So you have a sword! Your weapon is probably much too dull to cut off my head."

As Nobushige drew his sword Hakuin remarked, "Here open the gates of hell!"

At these words the samurai, perceiving the master's discipline, sheathed his sword and bowed.

"Here open the gates of paradise," said Hakuin.



A Buddha

In Tokyo in the Meiji era there lived two prominent teachers of opposite characteristics. One, Unsho, an instructor in Shingon, kept Buddha's precepts scrupulously. He never drank intoxicants, nor did he eat after eleven o'clock in the morning. The other teacher, Tanzan, a professor of philosophy at the Imperial University, never observed the precepts. Whenever he felt like eating, he ate, and when he felt like sleeping in the daytime he slept.

One day Unsho visited Tanzan, who was drinking wine at the time.

"Hello, brother," Tanzan greeted him. "Won't you have a drink?"

"I never drink!" exclaimed Unsho solemnly.

"One who does not drink is not even human," said Tanzan.

"Do you mean to call me inhuman just because I do not indulge in intoxicating liquids!" exclaimed Unsho in anger. "Then if I am not human, what am I?"

"A Buddha," answered Tanzan.



Temper

A Zen student came to Bankei and complained: "Master, I have an ungovernable temper. How can I cure it?"

"You have something very strange," replied Bankei. "Let me see what you have."

"Just now I cannot show it to you."

"When can you show it to me?"

"It arises unexpectedly,"

"Then, concluded Bankei, "it must not be your own true nature. If it were, you could show it to me at any time. When you were born you did not have it, and your parents did not give it to you. Think that over."



Zhaozhou's Sky

Zhaozhou said, "The sky does not go into the world to teach."