



Koans for Taking Refuge in the Bodhisattva Way

Summer 2008

Master Yuangui used divination to choose a site for his cottage in a valley deep in the mountains, to live the life of a recluse. One day a strange man appeared, wearing formal attire and accompanied by a large retinue of attendants. He demanded to see Yuangui, who greeted him, “Welcome, friend. Why have you come here?”

The visitor, who turned out to be the god of the mountain, engaged in a dharma dialogue with Yuangui. At the end of it, the god bowed down to the floor and said, “I am the most confident and upright of the gods, but I didn’t realize that you possessed such eloquence and wisdom. Please give me the true precepts that will enable me to transcend the world.”

Yuangui replied, “When you ask about the precepts you are already observing the precepts, because there are no precepts apart from seeking the precepts.”

Three monks 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.”

One of the monks asked, “The river ahead is deep—can we cross it?”

The woman said, “Your feet won’t get wet.”

“Where do you live, lady?”

“I’m just right here.”

When the monks got to her shop, the woman prepared 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 blankly at each other, she said, “Watch this decrepit old woman show her own miraculous power.” Then she picked up the cups, poured the tea, and went out.

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

Dongshan replied, “It’s only for your benefit, Honored One.”

Why are completely enlightened bodhisattvas attached to the blood-red thread?

Yunyan asked, “How does Guanyin, bodhisattva of compassion, use all those hands and eyes?”
Daowu answered, “It’s like someone in the middle of the night reaching behind her head for the pillow.”

Fengxue said, “If you raise a speck of dust, the nation flourishes. If you don’t raise a speck of dust, the nation perishes.”

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

The bodhisattva of wisdom, Manjushri, welcomed the pilgrim Wuzho, asking, “Where are you from?”

“From the South,” replied Wuzho.

“How is Buddhism being maintained in the South?”

“In this Corrupt Age of the Dharma, people are honoring the precepts a little.”

“How many are there?”

“Three hundred here, five hundred there. How is Buddhism being maintained here?”

“Ordinary people and saints live together. Dragons and snakes mix.”

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!”

A group of practitioners invited a master of meditation to give them instruction. She told them that they must strive to acquire freedom from strong reactions to the events of daily life, an attitude of habitual reverence, and the regular practice of a method of meditation whose object was to realize the one life pervading all things.

“In the end you must come to this realization not only during meditation, but in daily life. The whole process is like filling a sieve with water.” She bowed and left.

They pondered on the image of the sieve without finding any solution that satisfied them all. In the end they dropped the whole thing—except for one woman, who made up her mind to see the teacher. The teacher gave the woman 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. The woman bent down, held the sieve in one hand, and scooped the water into it with the cup. The water barely appeared in the bottom of the sieve before it was gone.

“How would you do it?” she asked.

The master took the sieve and threw it far out into the sea, where it floated momentarily and then sank. “Now it’s full of water,” she said.

Out the front door there are two paths. Which one goes to heaven and which goes to hell?