

On the *Record of Rinzai*

PART I

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I SIMPLY COULDN'T OPEN MY MOUTH

Today I will begin my talks on the *Record of Rinzai*. As you know, this record relates the sayings and actions of the Zen master Rinzai Gigen, as compiled by his disciple Sanshō Enen. It has a long and well-established reputation for being quite impenetrable. We won't possibly be able to examine all of it during this sesshin.

The meaning of the *Record of Rinzai* isn't something that ends with such outward expressions as words or actions. As Rinzai says at the beginning of the work,

If I were to demonstrate the Great Matter in strict keeping with the teaching of the Patriarchal School, I simply couldn't open my mouth.¹

Neither words nor actions can adequately express it. And yet, without my uttering a single word or making the slightest movement, it is now manifesting itself in all of its majesty, so it really doesn't matter whether I can cover all of the *Record* during this sesshin or not. It is *immediately present truth*, beyond all words and actions. From this truth, Rinzai's record comes into being.

* The original text of these talks is found in *The Collected Works of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi*, Volume VI, *Kyōroku-shō* (Tokyo: Risōsha, 1973), pp. 191–204, 539–543. Footnotes have been provided by the translators. The talks were given for the FAS Society at the fall sesshin in September 1962, at the Reiun-in sub-temple of Myōshinji, Kyoto.

¹ *The Record of Lin-chi*, tr. Ruth Fuller Sasaki (Kyoto: Institute for Zen Studies, 1975), p. 1. Henceforth, all page numbers will refer to this translation, portions of which have been adapted for these talks.

No matter how many words I use during these talks, if I only rely on verbal exposition, I will not truly lecture on Rinzai's record and you will not hear it. Only when our Original Face emerges and speaker and listener are one, does true speaking and listening take place. At that point, there is neither speaker nor listener. Rinzai often addresses his disciples as "You who are listening to the Dharma" (p. 7). It can be said here that the *You* who is listening is the *I* who is uttering the words. That is not a question of a long seven-day sesshin: it is right here, right now. But, Rinzai then says, "I have unavoidably yielded to what people desire of me and have taken this preaching seat" (p. 7). This reveals his constant concern with going into the world for the benefit of others.

This is apt to be mistaken for merely expedient means—Rinzai descending to a secondary level to preach. But, in terms of the Original Face, the True Self, or what Rinzai calls the "True Person without Rank," all of Rinzai's words and actions are the Dynamic Functioning of the True Person. We must not think of them as mere expedients.

Moreover, all of Rinzai's words, without exception, are at the same time the words of "You who are listening." Viewing Rinzai's actions externally as *his* actions, or hearing his words as *his* words, is contrary to the way of being of "You who are listening." The listener and Rinzai are never two; none of Rinzai's statements or actions is other than the Dynamic Functioning of "You who are listening." Only when this oneness is achieved is the *Record of Rinzai* truly lectured on and truly heard.

When an authentic seeker of the Way reads or listens to Zen records, he doesn't get caught up in the written words or in the matters they relate. It is possible for us to grasp Rinzai's entire *Record*, in the fullest sense, by means of just one of its words or phrases. For example, he says, "I simply couldn't open my mouth." Right here, in that very utterance, Rinzai's True Person without Rank is manifesting itself. If we take this statement at face value, we miss the authentic sense in which it is uttered.

What did Rinzai mean when he said, "I simply couldn't open my mouth"? He didn't only mean that the Dharma cannot be expressed in words. It is his True Face magnificently revealing itself right there. "I couldn't open my mouth" is "You who listen," the True Person without Rank. Rinzai's Great Activity of total emancipation emerges from within this "I couldn't open my mouth," filling every page of the *Record* with great vitality and life. I wouldn't want this activity to be taken as something eleven-hundred years old. Rinzai is said to have died in 867. If we

regard his *Record* in the manner of historians, that is, as a document of the early period of Chinese Zen, it will be a mere record of the past, and not the words and actions of our living Self here and now. The way for us, as religious seekers, to truly respond to the *Record* is to seek it within ourselves. *Right now*, within us, where is it?

Throughout the *Record*, Rinzai stresses that we should not seek Buddha outside ourselves. That will only take us farther from it. The "Buddha" must be Rinzai himself, and this "Rinzai" mustn't be something we seek externally. Rinzai is within us—there is no Rinzai apart from our own Original Face. Only when this is realized does the *Record of Rinzai* reveal itself directly as our own words and actions. If we read it literally or merely copy Rinzai's behavior, we are doing nothing more than an empty impersonation. What we must do is extricate ourselves from the *Record* so that the words and actions of the living Rinzai emerge from us.

There is a Chinese master of the Sung period named Shōgen Sōgaku, who is an important figure for Japanese Rinzai Zen. He severely condemned the Rinzai Zen monks of his time for memorizing Zen records and imitating the actions described in them. This critical spirit is important for us today as well. Many aspects of modern Japanese Zen deserve to be dealt one of Shōgen's crushing blows. Shōgen denounced blind adherence to Zen texts or koans. He said it was a world apart from authentic Zen. The only way to make the *Record* our own is for us to become the True Person without Rank and display its great awakened activity ourselves. We can't do this by imitating Rinzai. We must have a constant flow of new and spontaneous activity.

To study and practice Rinzai's Way means to free oneself from him. His Original Face—the true Rinzai—must function as our own Original Face. Here, there can be no Rinzai, any more than there can be a Sakyamuni, Bodhidharma, or Sixth Patriarch. We must free ourselves from them all. Rinzai's well-known "Encountering a buddha, killing the buddha; encountering a patriarch, killing the patriarch" (p. 25) admonishes against having anything to do with buddhas or patriarchs. We must not be attached to them. They, of all things, are most apt to restrict us and involve us in complications. Rinzai tells us to transcend them, and free ourselves from attachment to them.

It is easy for us to get caught up in what we revere. We have little trouble parting from what we despise, the difficulty is in parting from what we cherish. When we lecture on Rinzai's *Record*, we tend to look up to him.

We feel drawn to him. But as long as he is outside us, he remains an *object* of our respect and devotion. That's not the way to venerate him. He wouldn't have hesitated a moment to give us a taste of his staff.

In the famous episode known as "the fist strikes the old father," Rinzai delivers a blow to his teacher Ōbaku. Such an action might seem extremely undutiful, but Rinzai himself knew that he had finally arrived at true filial piety. If Ōbaku had merely been a teacher who existed as an external presence, Rinzai would never have been able to become his Dharma heir. This exemplifies what Zen means by the "transmission from Mind to Mind."

We sometimes hear the expression, "Nothing brought in through the gate is family treasure." No matter how exalted a Zen master might be, insofar as he exists outside of you, he isn't your own true family treasure. It is said that "even gold dust becomes a hindrance to sight when it gets in your eye." If Ōbaku were to have existed in any form within Rinzai, the True Person without Rank, he would have been nothing but a screen over Rinzai's eyes. Awakening to his Original Face, Rinzai became "solitarily emancipated and non-dependent" (p. 25), a man who relied on nothing. If any element of Rinzai remains in us, we are not solitarily emancipated or non-dependent, nor are we the True Self in "solitary freedom transcending all things" (p. 23)—the Self as itself. We all must realize Rinzai in ourselves and his *Record* as our own words and actions.

WHO IS PURE AND DIRECT IN HIS BEHAVIOR?

Only two days are left in this sesshin. I am extremely pleased to see how you have all been practicing earnestly day and night in this intense heat. I am sorry my health has kept me from participating with you more.

Since the text for this sesshin is the *Record of Rinzai*, the lectures have special significance. We won't be able to cover all of it in this one week. If possible, I would like to continue at a later date. What I want to do is to take some of the central ideas found in the *Record* and relate them to the present day. The points we take up, however, don't have to be those that have been considered important in the past. In lectures such as these, the most important thing is for you to grasp Rinzai firmly within yourself. Only then can you begin to talk. Now, with this in mind, let us penetrate to the center of Rinzai's *Record*.

As I said last time, the lecturer and the listener must be one. The lecturer is the listener, the listener the lecturer. That's how we lock eyebrows directly with Rinzai. He must be one with our True Self at this very moment. We have to inquire into Rinzai's True Self. Who is Rinzai? To begin, let us examine the circumstances surrounding his decision to begin Zen practice and the events involved in his great Awakening.

We are told at the end of the *Record* that he displayed exceptional intelligence in his youth. As a Zen master, his style was trenchant and razor-sharp. He has been compared to a general able to command three armies at once. To have all things right in the palm of one's hand, and to be able to use them at will, without any hindrance, requires an exceptional wisdom. You need eyes that have penetrated the whole. You must have extraordinary activity.

The characteristics of Rinzai's style, then, were already in evidence in his childhood. Later in his youth, he was tonsured and ordained as a monk. The *Record* tells us that he "frequented the lecture halls" (p. 62). This means he was studying scholastic Buddhism, the Buddhism Zen regards as "within the scriptures." He went to temples where Buddhist lectures were being given and devoted himself to mastering the Buddhist vinaya, sutras, and sastras.

After he had done this a while, he realized the inadequacy of his approach to Buddhism. He called it a "medical prescription for saving mankind" (p. 62). Now, most people would not find fault with such a

“prescription.” They would take it to be Buddhism’s proper role. But Rinzai was deeply dissatisfied with the kind of study he had been pursuing in the lecture halls.

Dissatisfaction with that approach to Buddhism prevailing at that time was one reason Zen flourished. Tokusan, a contemporary of Rinzai, was a great student of the Diamond Sutra. But he, too, discovered that scholarly investigation was not the way to understand it, and could in no way help him bring about any fundamental change in himself. Even supposing we are able to lecture on the Diamond Sutra with great skill, if that can’t help us transform our way of being, then we will end up like Tokusan, unable to answer even the question of an old woman at the roadside.²

We can’t transform our way of being through objective knowledge and ideas. True transformation is impossible unless we become our True Self completely. The Diamond Sutra says that “The past Mind is unattainable, the present Mind is unattainable, and the future Mind is unattainable.” As long as this statement is just words to us, its true meaning—that which is unattainable in the three divisions of time—does not emerge as our Self. This falls short of the true goal of Buddhism. We are merely reading about the virtues of the medicine; if we don’t take it, we can’t cure our illness.

When Tokusan was stumped by the old woman’s question, he realized that his labors up to that point had been for nothing. Without hesitating,

² Tokusan originally was a student of the Diamond Sutra, and at one point set out to refute the Zen teaching of Enō which contended that a man could be a buddha by directly grasping his true nature. On his way to Ryūzan, the mountain where the Zen master Ryūtan Sōshin lived, Tokusan stopped at a roadside teahouse for a snack (*tenshin*, “punctuation of the mind”). Instead of giving Tokusan his order, the old woman working there asked, “What are you carrying on your back?”

Tokusan answered, “My commentaries on the Diamond Sutra.”

“They are indeed,” said the woman. “May I ask you a question? If you can answer it to my satisfaction, you will have your refreshments free; but, if you fail, you will have to go somewhere else.”

Tokusan agreed, whereupon the old woman continued, “I read in the Diamond Sutra that the mind is attainable neither in the past, nor in the present, nor in the future. If so, which mind do you wish to punctuate?”

This unexpected query from an apparently insignificant old woman stumped Tokusan despite his scholarship and the commentaries on the Diamond Sutra that he carried on his back. He was thus thwarted in his attempt to eat lunch and in his endeavor to destroy the southern school of Zen. (Adapted from D. T. Suzuki’s *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, Second Series, London, 1933, pp. 49–50.)

he set fire to his precious commentaries on the Diamond Sutra, which he had been carrying around with him everywhere. Of course, Tokusan wasn't the only one who became disillusioned with scholastic Buddhism. Countless others have too. Many have turned to Zen's teaching beyond the written words. The dissatisfaction of Rinzai and others like him was a necessary moment in Zen's development.

The awakening of the Sixth Patriarch, Enō, occurred when he happened to hear someone reciting a passage in the Diamond Sutra: "One should arouse the Mind that abides nowhere." His awakening did not result from study of the literal meaning of the text—he directly realized in himself the Mind that arises without abiding anywhere. This is his basic significance as a man of Zen.

True Zen is not a matter of "gradual awakening," in which satori comes only after we practice for millions of kalpas. Buddhist emancipation is manifesting itself here and now. It isn't contingent on time or place—it can only be "present manifestation." It must be sudden and original awakening; not something in the future, but actual existence, right now beyond past, present, and future. "Sudden" does not refer to a short duration of time. It means "as-it-is." "As-it-is" is the true Tathatā. This is where Zen frees itself from the practice of gradual enlightenment.

The Buddhist vinaya teaches a gradual practice. Satori is said to open up through merits accumulated by observing certain rules of behavior. We must desist from evil and practice good, and we finally arrive at Buddhahood through the constant observance of the precepts. Good and evil in this sense, of course, are not limited to their usual ethical meaning. But even so, the precepts to be observed are endless, and it is only by observing all of them that we can become buddhas. As a result, Buddha comes to be posited in the beyond, or in the future. This is radically different from saying that Buddha is the "Truly So" existing right here. It is not hard to understand why Rinzai came to harbor doubts about the precepts and scriptures, and concluded that they are only a prescription for saving mankind, not the truth apart from the scriptures.

Zen's extra-canonical tradition was already thriving in Rinzai's time, and it is unlikely that his decision to abandon scriptural Buddhism was reached without knowledge of that tradition. Since the Sixth Patriarch's time, this "transmission outside the teaching" had become increasingly known.

The lineage of the Sixth Patriarch (638–713) includes Nangaku Ejō (677–744), Baso Dōitsu (709–788), Hyakujō Ekai (720–814), and Ōbaku

Kiun (d. 850). Rinzai attained satori under Ōbaku. That places him several generations away from the Sixth Patriarch. Zen in those days produced a great many masters of outstanding ability. It was truly a golden age. Rinzai's realization of the essential importance of the "teaching transmitted apart from the scriptures," and his decision to renounce his traditional Buddhist studies in order to concentrate on Zen, occurred within such a setting. We should take an example from this. Intellectual learning affects every area of life in the present world. Scholarship, in both Japan and the West, can be said to correspond to the study that took place in the T'ang dynasty lecture halls. Modern Buddhology, while taking in new Western ways of study, has tended to follow in the footsteps of traditional Chinese methods emphasizing the doctrinal study of the different schools. Practice has become an object of research. Living practice has been all but ignored.

The only tie such scholars have to Buddhism is their objective research. They have become strangers to practice, and, because of that, to satori itself. So long as they work in this way, that which they study cannot become the total functioning of their own True Self. They are unable to investigate Tathatā or to interpret Buddhism from within the living Tathatā. It is not possible for us to explain it, much less live it in everyday life, if we stand outside it. It is essential, then, that Buddhist scholars—scholars in all fields, for that matter—ask themselves why Rinzai left the lecture halls. The question is ultimately, What solves our most fundamental problem? What is the source from which that problem arises?

By the time Rinzai decided to leave the lecture halls, a great doubt had emerged in him. He went to Ōbaku and devoted himself singlemindedly to Zen practice. The earnestness with which he applied himself is described in the "Record of Pilgrimages" section of the *Record*: "When Rinzai was one of the assembly of monks under Ōbaku, he was pure and direct in his behavior" (p. 50). "Pure and direct in his behavior" describes the Rinzai who had resolved to grasp, at all costs, the true meaning of Zen's "transmission apart from the scriptures."

Rinzai had thrown everything aside to concentrate on a life of Zen practice. He could not have been anything but "pure and direct." He wasn't after a taste of Zen or a little knowledge. His sole objective was the investigation and elucidation of what Zen calls "one's own matters." This has nothing to do with anyone else. When one is investigating and elucidating oneself, one must be dead serious. It is occasionally said that

“to enter Zen, one must enter the realm of death,” or that “you can’t get a tiger cub without entering the tiger’s lair.” These sayings, like Rinzai’s declaration that “the person who lives for the Dharma does not shrink from sacrificing life or limb” (p. 4), all emphasize that authentic exploration of the Way is not something to be undertaken in a half-hearted manner.

We are hindered, however, by various entanglements, which can constrict us until we are unable to function. They are what Buddhism calls “karma since the beginningless beginning.” This karmic net must be cut away at one stroke. To sever these entanglements from within and cast them away—for the emancipated Self to emerge—is no easy matter. Many people think such liberation is impossible. This gives rise to pessimism. We can’t extricate ourselves from this situation in our normal way of being unless we have great resolve. To reach our goal, we must lay every other consideration aside. A resolute spirit is essential.

When we first go to a Zen monastery, it is extremely difficult to obtain permission to enter the zendō. I was fortunate in having had a good teacher. “When you go to the zendō,” he told me, “go as if your life is at stake. If you are going to go with the half-hearted intention of living through it and returning home, then you had better not go at all.” There are three essentials for sanzen. The first is Great Faith, so strong it won’t allow us to leave our practice even for a moment; we go on even if it will mean our death. The second is a Great Doubting Spirit—without it, satori is impossible. The third is Great Resolution.

When such a spirit of doubt arose in Rinzai, he turned away from the lecture masters. He had doubts about what he had been doing, and doubts about what lay in the future. He was unable to leave these uncertainties unsolved, and as a result Great Resolution arose in him. Those who lack this determination can achieve nothing. We need great resolve and considerable practice to awaken to the Self and sever at a stroke the entanglements existing “since the beginningless beginning.” Only then can our goal be realized. And yet, if we have this constantly in mind, it becomes a serious obstacle to satori.

One day, Nangaku walked up to where Baso was doing zazen. He picked up a tile and immediately became engrossed in polishing it. Baso wondered about this and asked, “Master, why are you polishing a tile?” Nangaku replied, “I’m trying to make it into a mirror.” What does Nangaku mean by this? If the notion of Great Doubt, Great Resolution, or Great Faith

occupies our thoughts when we do zazen, we are not truly practicing. Nangaku asked Baso, "When you make an ox pull a cart and the cart does not go ahead, which should you whip, the cart or the ox?" When we think that we must stake everything on our practice, and this thought occupies our mind, we cannot do zazen. Though we can't practice without Great Faith, Great Resolution, or Great Doubt, they don't come to life and start working for us until they disappear from our minds. This is an element that is essential for authentic practice. Thinking that one must sit, and actually sitting, are two different things.

Rinzai achieved "practice-samadhi." With everything thrust away and forgotten, he was totally engrossed in his practice. In this "pure and direct" activity, Faith, Doubt, and Resolution were working with great intensity. The head monk said, "This fellow's still young, but he's not like the rest." And others, too, felt there was something different about him, that he was no ordinary person. I think this is only natural. This is how we must be when the resolve to practice the Way truly arises in us.

Rinzai kept on practicing singlemindedly, but he never went to Ōbaku to ask about the Dharma. This is an extremely important point in practice, which involves problems having to do with asking one's master for instruction, "entering the master's chamber," and mondō. Rinzai just sat silently for three years. Not once during that time did he go to Ōbaku with a question.

The head monk went up to Rinzai and said, "How many years have you been here?" When Rinzai told him he had been there for three years, the head monk said, "Three years? Why don't you go to the Master and ask him about the Dharma?" Rinzai replied, "I don't know what to ask. What should I ask about?"

Now, what about this? I am sure we could think of any number of things to ask. To us, it seems inconceivable that someone engrossed for three whole years in practice-samadhi would have nothing to ask about. But what is the ultimate question? Buddhism asks ultimate questions and gives ultimate answers. How about you? Right at this moment, what should you ask? How many people know *how* to ask? Do such people even exist? Can *you* ask a question, the answer to which, if received, will resolve your fundamental problem once and for all? If the question remains merely in our heads, it cannot become an ultimate question which will clarify for us the essence of the "special transmission apart from the scriptures." Here is where the significance of the Great Doubting Mass comes in. To

ask the ultimate question—there is nothing else beyond that.

In the *Mumonkan*, Mumon says, "A million doubts become one doubt." If we deal with doubts one by one as they appear, our practice will go on endlessly, never achieving its true end. The precepts the Hinayanists observe are endless. The point is never reached where they can all be observed. In the end, the one fundamental question, which includes everything, never becomes known. Zen must pose this question. The Great Doubting Mass, in which all doubts become one doubt, does not arise at the end of a line of objective or dualistic thought. All of me, all the world, all perception and cognition, and all sense objects must come together as one doubt. In terms of Buddhist doctrine, this total doubt corresponds to the eighth, or "store," consciousness. The eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, and all that they perceive must become one doubting mass. When that Doubt crumbles away, we attain satori, in which all our large and small awakenings become one Great Awakening. There is a time-honored saying: "Strike down with a sword into the field of the eighth consciousness." When we cut through the eighth consciousness and make it "turn over," the eight consciousnesses transform into the four Wisdoms. This is referred to as the "transformation of consciousness and the attainment of wisdom"—the wisdom of satori.

The fundamental question is not easy. It is understandable that Rinzai didn't know what to ask. We will never realize what he meant if we think the less of him for not knowing what to ask.

The head monk then said to Rinzai, "Quick! Go and ask him what the Buddha Dharma is all about."

Anyone, not only a practitioner of Zen, can ask about the awakened way of being or the ultimate point of Buddhism. The truth of the awakened way of being, however, has nothing to do with what is referred to today when people speak of the "essence of Buddhism" or the "concept of Buddha."

The head monk is revealing his Original Face to Rinzai. He isn't simply telling him to ask about the essence of the awakened way of being. That essence is fulfilled beyond words in the head monk. Because it is, he has a way of questioning that can point Rinzai in the right direction. It is not the words—they could be said by anyone. To advise someone as earnest and determined as Rinzai to go and ask such a thing is not easy. Rinzai was fortunate to have had an outstanding head monk. The way in which he guides Rinzai can be clearly seen, and the full extent of his kindness,

the distinctive character of his Zen compassion, is realized when we have experienced such guidance ourselves.

Although the ultimate question is difficult to ask, when we Awaken, we realize there is nothing special. Awakening is *not* a matter of the future, or something apart from us; it is not an experience in time or space, but present existence right here and right now. It is the Formless Self which is beyond all temporal or spatial dimensions, constantly functioning while assuming forms freely and without hindrance.

Rinzai went to Ōbaku as the head monk had advised. What happened there? What sort of Ōbaku did Rinzai encounter? How did Ōbaku handle him? The living aspect of Patriarchal Zen is revealed in the way in which Ōbaku deals with Rinzai. In response to the ultimate question, an answer in terms of religious doctrine would, of course, be meaningless. What was the result of their first encounter? I would like to leave these matters for next time. In the meantime, I want all of you to become Rinzai and come up with that ultimate question.

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