

TRANSLATION

Talks by Hakuin Introductory to Lectures On the Records of Old Sokkō (2) (Sokkō-roku kaien fusetsu)

TRANSLATED BY NORMAN WADDELL

*PRIEST KEMPŌ instructed his assembly:*¹

"The Dharma-body has three kinds of infirmity and two kinds of light.² Does anyone here know the particulars?"

Ummon stepped forward. "How could someone inside the temple be ignorant of what goes on outside?" he said.

Kempō roared with laughter.

"I have my doubts about that," Ummon said.

"What's going on in that mind of yours?" said Kempō.

"You should know the particulars," said Ummon.

"I see you've finally reached a place of safety," said Kempō.

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¹ This dialogue between Kempō 乾峯 (Chinese, Ch'ien-feng, no dates), an heir of Tōzan Ryōkai 洞山良价 (Tung-shan Liang-chieh, 807-869), and Ummon Bun'en 雲門文偃 (Yun-men Wen-yen, 862-949) appears in the *Renō-eyō* 聯燈會要 (*Lien-teng yuan-yao*), ch. 33. Kidō Chigu's ("Old Sokkō") own versified comments on this dialogue appear in the *Sokkō-roku* (Records of Kidō), ch. 8.

² The infirmities and lights are types of illusion which occur on route to an enlightened state of total freedom. Ummon's "Two Illnesses" and "Three Illnesses," patterned on those of his teacher, are famous.

Anyone who wants to read Old Sokkō's *Records* must first penetrate these words spoken by Kempō and Ummon. If you can grasp the meaning of the dialogue passed between these two great Zen masters, I will sanction you as one who has seen old Sokkō face to face. I will affirm you as a monk who has penetrated the hidden depths.

If you cannot grasp it, even though you master the secrets of Zen's Five Houses and Seven Schools and penetrate the inner meaning of all 1700 koans, it will be nothing but empty theory. Lifeless learning. You won't be able to make the slightest use of it.

Even more useless is the custom students have today of noting down the words they hear from their deadbeat teachers and making manuscripts of them. Or writing down the misguided comments these priests make in their lectures on Zen texts and inscribing them on slips of paper to paste as cribs into the margins of their books.³

During the last century, a Chinese priest named Genkan Yōkaku (active during the Ch'ung-chen period, 1628-1644, of the Ming) offered an interpretation of this dialogue, but his mistaken comments are so far off the mark, they not only totally misconstrue Kempō's meaning, they are a terrible slur on the great Zen teacher Ummon as well.⁴

In Zen temples today, those who lecture on master Sokkō's⁵ verses explain them by twisting their meaning to make them agree with their own feeble understanding. With this, they pretend that they have delivered the final word on them. They commit the comments to paper and pass them on to their followers. Then these blind Dharma ninnies without even knowing it proceed to bury their spirits under a load of filth. They become dangerous weapons, wreaking great injury on the vital pulse of wisdom.

Monks scramble over one another to get hold of these notes. They

³ Zen students annotated the pages of Zen texts with glosses on difficult words and terms, or with comments taken verbatim from their teachers' Zen lectures (*teishō*).

⁴ Kuzan Genkan Yōkaku 鼓山元賢永覺 (Chinese, Ku-shan Yuan-chien Yung-chiao, 1578-1657). Also known by his honorary title Yōkaku Daishi 永覺大師 (Yung-chiao Tashih), Genkan was regarded in China as one of the great religious teachers of the age. Hakuin attacks him frequently in his writings.

⁵ A literary name of Kidō Chigu 虛堂智愚 (Hsu-t'ang Chih-yu). Kidō is noted for his religious poetry. Hakuin gave these talks (*fusetsu*) prior to a meeting held for him to deliver lectures (*teishō*) on Kidō's Zen records, the *Sokkō-roku* (Records of Kidō). See part 1, introduction.

make copies of them. They treasure them, keep them a dark secret, and never allow anyone near them. They transfer the comments to small slips of paper and paste them as glosses into the printed pages of Zen writings, ridiculously supposing that such pastimes will help them to understand the meaning of the text.

On one of these little slips of paper that I happened to see were inscribed the words:⁶

*The fourth chapter of the Zen'yo naishū*⁷. A general talk (fusetsu) the Ming priest Yōkaku gave to his assembly during a December sesshin:

"Although Kempō says that the Dharma-body has three kinds of infirmity and two kinds of light,⁸ you must be aware that there is an opening through which you can pass beyond these obstructions. Now I am going to explain Kempō's words to you in detail, even if I have to lose my eyebrows for doing it."⁹

"As a rule, mountains, streams, the great earth, light and darkness, form and emptiness, and all the other myriad phenomena obstruct your vision and are thus impediments to the Dharma-body. This is the first infirmity mentioned by Kempō.

"When you realize the emptiness of all things and discern dimly the true principle of the Dharma-body, your attachment to the Dharma remains—that is the second infirmity.

"Breaking through the Dharma-body, you proceed to investigate various things anew, and you realize there is no way to grasp hold of it, to postulate it or indicate it to others, so Dharma-attachment still remains—that is the last of the infirmities.

⁶ Hakuin seems to mean that he found this passage from the *Zen'yo naishū* inscribed on a slip of paper inserted into a printed copy of the *Sokkō-roku*, presumably at the place in ch. 8 where the dialogue between Kempō and Ummon appears.

⁷ *Zen'yo naishū* 禪餘內集 (Chinese, *Ch'an-yu nei-chi*, 8 ch.) A collection of Genken's Zen records that was later incorporated into the *Yōkaku oshō kōroku* (*Yung-chiao ho-shang kuang-lu*; Comprehensive Records of Priest Yung-chiao). In Japan, a heavily annotated edition of the *Zen'yo naishū* was published in 1676. I have not had access to this edition; but the passage is found in the *Yōkaku oshō kōroku*, among the *fusetsu* in ch. 5.

⁸ "Light" 光; in the sense of wisdom which has appeared but which is still not pure, that is, not yet totally free of attachment.

⁹ A Buddhist teacher is said to lose his eyebrows if he preaches the Dharma incorrectly or too explicitly.

"The first infirmity is a sort of light which is not completely emancipated. The second and third infirmities are a kind of light as well, and it too has not achieved complete freedom.

"Once a student has bored his way forward through the opening I mentioned, he is beyond these obstructions and can see clearly the three infirmities and two lights with no need for the slightest bit of further effort."

Ahh, such useless words. Discriminatory drivel of the first water. Having read that much, my hands involuntarily closed the book. I doubted my own eyes, so I shut them and just sat there, utterly appalled. Even granting that these comments are correct as far as they go, what about the meaning of Ummon's words: "How can someone inside the temple be ignorant of what goes on outside?" How about foot-noting that?

Don't think for a moment that Yōkaku has penetrated Kempō's meaning. Don't even think that Ummon's meaning is ungraspable. The utterances passed between these two great and worthy old teachers are a pair of long swords slanting high into the heavens. They are the sharp fangs of a ferocious tiger, the trunk of the elephant king, the milk of the lion, a drum lacquered with poison,¹⁰ a world-ending conflagration. If you falter before them, show the slightest hesitation, you find yourself standing on a vast, skull-covered moor. Dialogues like these are the tusks and talons of the Dharma cave, divine amulets that rob you of your very life. You must know that they stand as shining examples for all who dwell in the Zen forests.

I have heard that Yōkaku was an outstanding teacher in the Sōtō school of Zen. A direct heir of priest Mumyō Ekyō of Jusho temple.¹¹ He is said to have had great success in reviving the essentials of master Tōzan's teaching¹² and in breathing new life into the true spirit of the Sixth Patriarch's Zen. He was clearly one of the dragons of his age. It is said that in China today the mere mention of his name makes people sit up straight and adjust their robes. If this is correct, how are we to account for the wild and woefully inadequate utterances we have just

¹⁰ All of these are virulent poisons.

¹¹ Jusho Mumyō Ekyō 壽昌無明慧經 (Shou-ch'ang Wu-ming Hui-ching, 1548-1618).

¹² Tōzan Ryōkai (Tung-shan Liang-chieh), one of the founders of the Sōtō (Ts'ao-tung) school of Zen.

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read? If the *Zen'yo naishū* does accurately record Yōkaku's words, his Zen attainment is dubious to say the very least!

I like to think that at a later date some irresponsible priests inserted their own notions surreptitiously into Yōkaku's work, thinking thereby to gain credit for them by passing them off as those of an eminent teacher.

Alas, anyone who would try to present discriminatory delusions of this ilk as the final reaches of the Zen Way could never have encountered either old Kempō or the great master Ummon, not even in his dreams. He doesn't deserve to be known as a teacher of men. He should never imagine that he "has no need for the slightest bit of further effort." Why he might grind out thousands, tens of thousands, even millions of "bits of further effort," but they would be exerted in vain.

It is deplorable for a priest of the Zen school to take its vital transmission, the very pulse the patriarchal teachers have passed personally from one to another, and reduce it to a conventional, elementary discussion not even worthy of the teaching schools.

In the past, for uttering just two false words—"Don't fall"—a man plunged into the cave-black darkness of a wild fox existence for five hundred lives.¹³ Make no mistake about it: once you allow even a single erroneous comment to pass your lips and blind students engaged in exploring the hidden depths, your fate is sealed. You have committed a blacker sin than if you had caused blood to flow from the body of every Buddha in the ten directions.

I am not saying this because I'm partial to my own ideas. I am not out to indulge my ego. I do it only because I hate to see these false, deluded notions spread, gain currency, and obstruct later generations of students in their progress toward the gates of enlightenment. They are a foul influence, polluting the true and original essence of the ancients. They alone are responsible for withering the groves of Zen, for parching the breath of life out of the Zen gardens. What goes on in the minds of such men?

I have heard that the Zen gardens in China ran to seed during the Ming dynasty. The customs and style of the school were choked com-

¹³ A reference to the story "Hyakujo's Fox," the second koan in the *Mumonkan* (*Wu-men kuan*).

pletely off. I can believe it. Here in our own country the Zen school is on its last legs. It is a truly horrifying situation.

I want the patricians penetrating Zen's hidden depths to know that these words of instruction Kempō addresses to his students are very very difficult—*difficult in the extreme*. So don't cook up easy explanations for them. Don't lap up fox slobberings like those we have just witnessed. Concentrate steadily and singlemindedly on penetrating Kempō's words. Stop talking. Just bore into them. When your body is beaded all over with cold sweat, it will come to you in a sudden flash. You will then see the infinite compassion contained in Kempō's instruction. You will grasp the timeless sublimity of Ummon's response. You will fully comprehend the essential truth that Sokkō captures in his verses. You will know that Yōkaku's explanations are a tissue of absurdities and find that you agree totally with the verdict I have pronounced on them. What a wonderful moment it will be!

One of the virtuous teachers of the past said:¹⁴

Even a veteran monk, who has experienced enlightenment and studied under many different teachers, will remain ensconced within his own views unless he runs up against the devious, villainous methods of a genuine master. He may be satisfied to suppress his ambitions and throw himself body and mind into his practice, he may follow the Way reverently, sifting and refining as he goes, but all he accomplishes is to clothe himself in cherished ideas of his own making, filthy, clinging garments he finds impossible to strip away. Once time and conditions are such that he sets out on his own to teach others, and he engages them in direct give and take, he discovers that he is unable to respond to their thrusts with the easy, spontaneous freedom of a true teacher. This is because he has just been going along savoring the fruits of his own attainment, and his teachers and others have always treated him with kindness and respect. When he encounters students face to face and tries to put his attainment to work, the words just do not come.

This remonstrance seems to have been directed expressly at the false teachers of today—the very ones I have been telling you about. They have immersed themselves in lakes of stagnant water. When they speak

¹⁴ Kidō Chigu ("Old Sokkō"); quotation from the *Sokkō-roku*, the third *fusetsu* in ch. 4.

to you it is from beneath a thick layer of scum. They say:

“Don’t get caught up in the introspection of koans. It’s a quagmire and will suck your self-nature under. Don’t look at written words. They’re a tangled jungle of vines and creepers and will grab hold of you and choke off your vital spirit.”

Don’t believe that for a moment! You know what that “self-nature” of theirs is? A snare that has trussed them up as fast as foxes and rabbits. That “vital spirit” is just as fishy. They’re buried under it like yams and chestnuts stuffed under the cooking coals. Where in the world do they pick these things up? Were they hidden on the back shelves of some old country store? Wherever, it must have been a pretty sleezy place.

There’s not a doubt in my mind, these are the miserable wretches Zen priest Chōsha said “confound the illusory workings of their own minds for ultimate truth.” They’re like the king that master Ō’an said lived alone in an old shrine deep in the mountains, never putting any of his knowledge to use.¹⁵

But the day will surely come. They will be confronted by a fearless monk who is ready to give his life for the Dharma. He will push a tough old koan right under one of their noses. Face to face with him, the monk will demand, “*What does this mean?*”

At that instant, do you think he will be able to satisfy him by telling him it’s a “quagmire”? Will he turn him away with those “vines and creepers”? No, he will be at an utter loss, unable to croak out any response at all.

At present, we are infested in this country with a race of smooth-tongued, worldly-wise Zen teachers who feed their students a ration of utter nonsense. “Why do you suppose Buddha-patriarchs through the ages were so mortally afraid of words and letters?” they ask you. “It is,” they answer, “because words and letters are a coast of rocky cliffs washed constantly by vast oceans of poison ready to swallow your wisdom and drown the life from it. Giving students stories and

¹⁵ Chōsha Keijin 長沙景岑 (Ch’ang-sha Ching-ts’en). Ō’an Donge 應庵曇華 (Yuan-an Tan-hua, 1103-1163) was a disciple of Kūkyū Jōryū 虎丘紹隆 (Hu-ch’iu Shao-lung, 1077-1136). The allusion to the “king living deep in the mountains,” that is, a practitioner of “silent illumination” Zen, based on a passage found in the *Gotō-egen* (*Wu-teng yao-yuan*) ch. 20, is referred to by Kidō in his *Records*, ch. 8.

episodes from the Zen past and having them penetrate their meaning is a practice that did not start until after the Zen school had already branched out into the Five Houses, and they were developing into the Seven Schools.¹⁶ Koan study represents a provisional teaching aid which teachers have devised to bring students up to the threshold of the house of Zen so as to enable them to enter the dwelling itself. It has nothing directly to do with the profound meaning of the Buddha-patriarchs' inner chambers."

An incorrigible pack of skinheaded mules has ridden this teaching to a position of dominance in the world of Zen. You cannot distinguish master from disciple, jades from common stones. They gather and sit—rows of sleepy inanimate lumps. They hug themselves, self-satisfied, imagining they are the paragons of Zen tradition. They belittle the Buddha-patriarchs of the past. They treat all their fellow priests with contempt. While celestial phoenixes linger in the shadows, starving away, this hateful flock of owls and crows rule the roost, sleeping and stuffing their bellies to their hearts' content.

If you don't have the eye of *kenshō*, it is impossible for you to use a single drop [of the Buddha's wisdom]. These men are heading straight for the realms of hell. That is why I say: if upon becoming a Buddhist monk you do not penetrate the Buddha's truth, you should turn in your black robe, give back all the donations you have received, and revert to being a layman.¹⁷

Don't you realize that every syllable contained in the Buddhist canon—all five thousand and forty-eight scrolls of scripture—is a rocky cliff jutting into deadly, poison-filled seas? Don't you know that each of the twenty-eight Buddhas and six Buddhist saints is a body of virulent poison?¹⁸ It rises up in monstrous waves that blacken the skies, swallow the radiance of the sun and moon, and extinguish the light of the stars and planets.

It is there as clear and stark as could be. It is staring you right in the

¹⁶ The "Five Houses" of Zen appeared in the T'ang dynasty; in the Sung dynasty two more schools emerged, making the Seven Schools.

¹⁷ Similar words appear in the *Dentō-roku* (*Chuan-teng lu*), ch. 2, section on Kanadeva 伽那提婆.

¹⁸ The first 28 Indian patriarchs in the Zen transmission beginning with Shakamuni Buddha and ending with Bodhidharma, and the six Chinese patriarchs who follow, ending with Enō (Hui-neng).

face. But none of you is awake to see it. You are like owls that venture out into the light of day, their eyes wide open, yet they couldn't even see a mountain were it towering in front of them. The mountain doesn't have a grudge against owls that makes it want to hide. The fault is with the owls alone.

You might cover your ears with your hands. You might put a blindfold over your eyes. Try anything you can think of to avoid these poisonous fumes. But you can't escape the clouds sailing in the sky, the streams tumbling down the hillsides. You can't evade the falling autumn leaves and scattering spring flowers.

You might wish to enlist the aid of the fleetest winged demon you can find. If you plied him with the best of food and drink and crossed his paw with gold, you might get him to take you on his back for a couple circumnavigations of the earth. But you would still not find so much as a thimbleful of ground where you could hide.

I am eagerly awaiting the appearance of some dimwit of a monk (or barring that, half such a monk) richly endowed with a natural stock of spiritual power and kindled within by a raging religious fire, who will fling himself unhesitatingly into the midst of this poison and instantly die the Great Death. Rising from that Death, he will arm himself with a calabash of gigantic size and roam the great earth seeking true and genuine monks.¹⁹ Wherever he encounters one, he will spit in his fists, flex his muscles, fill his calabash with deadly poison and fling a dipperful of it over him, drenching him head to foot, so that he too is forced to surrender his life. Ah! what a magnificent sight to behold!

The Zen priests of today are busily imparting a teaching to their students that sounds something like this:

"Don't misdirect your efforts. Don't chase around looking for something apart from your own selves. All you have to do is to concentrate on being thoughtless, on doing nothing whatever. No practice. No realization. Doing nothing, the state of no-mind, is the direct path of sudden realization. No practice, no realization—that is the true principle, things as they really are. The enlightened ones themselves,

¹⁹ Allusion to the teaching methods of Seppō Gison 雪峰義存 (Hsueh-feng I-ts'un, 822-908), a famous T'ang monk who carried a calabash dipper with him on his pilgrimages and instructed students while serving as *tenzō*, or temple cook.

those who possess every attribute of Buddhahood, have called this supreme, unparalleled, right awakening."²⁰

People hear this teaching and try to follow it. Choking off their aspirations. Sweeping their minds clean of delusive thoughts. They dedicate themselves solely to doing nothing and to making their minds complete blanks, blissfully unaware that they are doing and thinking a great deal.

When a person who has not had *kenshō* reads the Buddhist scriptures, questions his teachers and fellow monks about Buddhism, or practices religious disciplines, he is merely creating the causes of his own illusion—a sure sign that he is still confined within samsara. He tries constantly to keep himself detached in thought and deed, and all the while his thoughts and deeds are attached. He endeavors to be doing nothing all day long, and all the while he is busily doing.

But if this same person experiences *kenshō*, everything changes. Although he is constantly thinking and acting, it is totally free and unattached. Although he is engaged in activity around the clock, that activity is, as such, non-activity. This great change is the result of his *kenshō*. It is like water that snakes and cows drink from the same cistern, which becomes deadly venom in one and milk in the other.

Bodhidharma spoke of this in his *Essay on the Dharma Pulse*²¹:

If someone without kenshō tries constantly to make his thoughts free and unattached, he commits a great transgression against the Dharma and is a great fool to boot. He winds up in the passive indifference of empty emptiness, no more able to distinguish good from bad than a drunken man. If you want to put the Dharma of non-activity into practice, you must bring an end to all your thought-attachments by breaking through into kenshō. Unless you have kenshō, you can never expect to achieve a state of non-doing.

²⁰ This passage appears in the *Sutra of Forty-two Sections*, section two.

²¹ *Ketsumyaku-ron*, or *Kechimyaku-ron* 血脉論 (Chinese, *Hsueh-mo lun*), "Essay on the Dharma Pulse," a work traditionally ascribed to Bodhidharma and included in a Japanese collection titled the *Shoshitsu rokumon* 小室六門, "Bodhidharma's Six Gates."