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Self-Portrait of Hakuin (see p. 73)

Ryōshōji, Iida, Nagano Prefecture

TRANSLATION

Wild Ivy

The Spiritual Autobiography of Hakuin Ekaku

PART I

TRANSLATED BY NORMAN WADDELL

Hakuin Ekaku was born on January 19, 1686, in the small fishing and farming village of Hara, a stop-over point on the main Tokaido road between Edo (Tokyo) and Kyoto situated at the foot of Mount Fuji. He died on January 18, 1769, at the Shōin-ji, the country temple in Hara that had been the center of his teaching activity for half a century.

Wild Ivy—a translation of the Japanese *Itsumadegusa*¹—is a long verse autobiography that Hakuin composed in the final month of 1765, his eighty-first year, only three years before his death. It was the last of his principal literary works, and last major statement of his Zen teaching.

Itsumadegusa has considerable value and interest as straight biography, both with respect to the external events it records of Hakuin's life and for its first-hand description of his spiritual growth. His primary motive for writing about him-

¹ *Itsumadegusa* 壁生草, a popular name for several Japanese plants, refers here to the *kizuta*, or wild ivy (*hedera rhombea*). The words *itsumade-gusa*, literally "until when? grasses," are descriptive of the ivy's proliferating nature. The Chinese characters used to write the words *itsu-made* are, however, arbitrary ones, meaning "wall" and "grow," respectively; they convey the fact that the wild ivy is a climber.

In the third chapter of the work, Hakuin speaks of a benevolent deity, whom he gives the name "Itsumadegusa Myōjin" or "Wild Ivy Deity," who he says stands guard over the Zen Dharma; so long as this Ivy Deity continues to grow, the Zen Dharma will never disappear entirely, even when the "winds of the false teachings sweep the land."

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self, however, was clearly instructional—he no doubt believed that a work of this kind could be of help to others, that they could profit from the hard-earned example of his own struggle for enlightenment. He thus does not hesitate to break the main narrative thread, frequently and at will, to insert short moral tales (largely, it seems, of his own making), to launch vigorous attacks on heretical Zen teachers of various kinds, and to exhort students with words of advice and caution. These asides serve to emphasize the points he considers of particular importance for the Zen student. He gives special stress throughout to the all-important “mind of enlightenment” (*bodhicitta*), which he discovered, after decades of search, to consist in “benefitting others by giving them the gift of the Dharma.” The mind of enlightenment is the source of Hakuin’s memoirs and their recurring theme, just as it was the animating principle behind his lifetime of unstinting effort to spread the Zen Dharma.

Part one, the first of three sections into which the text is divided, opens with a longish preamble on the proper role of the Zen monk and the great danger of preaching a false doctrine. Hakuin then starts his personal memoirs with some episodes from his childhood, and the events leading up to his entry into the priesthood. He next chronicles the many vicissitudes of his travels in search of enlightenment, which lasted for six years and took him over most of the country, continuing until his meeting, at the age of twenty-four, with Shōju Rōjin. Under Shōju’s guidance, he achieved his decisive enlightenment experience, and learned from him the importance of “post-satori” practice. The chapter ends with his tearful leave-taking from Shōju, as he headed homeward to care for his former teacher, who had fallen ill.

The Text

The original text of *Itsumadegusa* is composed in a peculiar variety of classical Chinese verse. It was (apparently) written under the influence of a type of light Japanese verse known as *kyōshi* (狂詩 “mad poetry”), which reached the height of its considerable popularity during the second half of the 18th century when Hakuin was writing.

At first glance, the verses, in seven-character lines, seem to follow the rules of Chinese metrical composition as employed in Japan. But their meaning cannot be understood unless they are read according to the conventions of colloquial Japanese syntax. The difficulty this creates for most modern readers has, one suspects, kept *Itsumadegusa* from being more widely read, although it is, after all, an autobiographical record—extremely rare in Zen—of one of Japan’s greatest religious figures.

In any case, it is not possible in translation to give an idea of the inherent interest of this kind of verse, which depends for its effects largely on verbal wit and ingenuity, and is, moreover, poetry in form only. Therefore, following the

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example of modern editors of the work, who transmogrify the Chinese verses into a less impenetrable Japanese-style transcription, I have translated it into ordinary prose.

Itsumadegusa first appeared in print in 1768, on the Buddha's birthday (the 8th day of the 4th month), in the last year of Hakuin's life. There were two wood-block printings that year; one at the Shōin-ji, Hakuin's temple in Hara, another at the Shidō-an in Edo, the temple of Hakuin's heir Tōrei Enji. This is the text I have used for the present translation. There are three modern editions, found in the following collections:

1. *Hakuin kōroku*, edited by Ōhashi Shungai and Uemura Yoshihide, Tokyo, 1902 (a slightly abridged text).
2. *Hakuin oshō zenshū*, vol 1, Tokyo, 1934.
3. *Hakuin zenji shū*, edited by Tokiwa Daijō: Dainihon bunko, bukkyō-hen #13, Tokyo, 1938.



The self-portrait reproduced opposite page 71 was painted by Hakuin at about the time he wrote *Itsumadegusa*. It depicts a remembered scene from the year 1707, on the road home from Fukuyama to the eastern provinces (see page 93). The inscription at the lefthand margin reads:

It was autumn of 1707, when I was twenty-two. I had left the training halls of the Tenshō-ji in Fukuyama, Harima province, travelling for home in the company of five fellow-monks. We were stopping at the Kaisei-ji in Nishino-miya. I slipped off by myself to do zazen, sitting on a large rock in the mountain behind the temple.

*At the foot of the mountain
The stream flows on without end;
If the mind of Zen is thus,
How can kenshō be far off?*

Painted in the winter of 1765, at the age of eighty, by the Old Monk Under the Sala Tree

Itsumadegusa

Including Some Childhood Tales

Anyone who wants to attain the way of enlightenment must drive forward the wheel of the four great vows.¹ Even after you have gained entry through the gate of non-duality,² if you lack the mind of enlightenment, you will sink into the paths of evil. In the past, the priest Jimyō underwent great hardships while living and practicing at Fun'yo, totally unmindful of the biting cold found 'east of the river'.³ He sat through the long bitter nights with never a wink of sleep. Whenever the demons of sleep approached, he would tell himself, "You pitiful creature. What are you? Alive, nothing you say will be of value to your contemporaries; when you die, not a syllable of yours will be known," and jab himself in the thigh with a gimlet. Here, truly, is an example to stand for a thousand future generations.

Anyone who would call himself a member of the Zen family must, before all else, achieve kenshō—attainment of the Way.⁴ If he says he is a man of Zen without kenshō, he is an outrageous fraud. A swindler pure and simple. A more shameless scoundrel than Kumasaka Chōhan!⁵

¹ *shigu seigan*: embodying the Mahayana ideal to work for deeper attainment for oneself at the same time one endeavors to help others to enlightenment, the four universal (Bodhisattva) vows are: "sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them; the deluding passions are inexhaustible, I vow to destroy them; the Dharma gates are manifold, I vow to enter them; the Buddha Way is supreme, I vow to master it."

² The stage of absolute non-differentiation, transcending all relative differences.

³ Jimyō 慈明 is the posthumous name of the Rinzai (Chin. Lin-chi) priest Sekisō Soen (Shih-shuang Ch'u-yuan, 986–1039), who studied under Fun'yo Zenshō (Fen-yang Shan-chao) in Fen-chou, modern Shansi. "East of the river" refers to the area east of the Yellow River in southwest Shansi. This famous story held special significance for Hakuin; see below, footnote 44.

⁴ Kenshō: seeing into your own nature, satori.

⁵ A legendary robber of the late Heian period.

We have more than eight sects of Buddhism in this country.⁶ Those who belong to the doctrinal sects devote themselves to mastering the sutras and commentaries; adherents of the Pure Land schools continually invoke the Buddha's Name. But among them, the place of preeminence belongs exclusively to those designated members of the Zen school—the Rinzai, Sōtō, and Ōbaku sects. Recently, however, even within Zen, priests have appeared who do nothing but sit like lifeless wooden blocks, 'silently illuminating' themselves.⁷ And beyond that, what do you suppose they regard as their most urgent business? Well, they prattle about 'doing nothing' being 'the man of true nobility,'⁸ and with that, they are content to feed themselves and pass day after day in a state of seated sleep. The surplice and cotton robes they wear as the badges of their priesthood? It's all just a disguise. There's one old priest who lives near here. He just sits in his hermitage all day, beating on the wooden fish and chanting in a loud voice, "*namu kara tarunō. . .*" A surplice hangs around his shoulders—but he has never experienced kenshō. I'd like to ask him: What does '*tora ya ya*' [the words that follow *namu kara tarunō*] really mean? I'll tell him what it means: *future existence is more terrifying than a hungry tiger!*⁹ I have made a verse to pour scorn on this odious race of pseudo-priests:

⁶ This apparently refers to the eight schools of Chinese Buddhism in Japan: Kegon, Ritsu, Hossō, Sanron, Jōjitsu, Kusha, Tendai, and Zen. Another classification includes Shingon instead of Zen. Hakuin intends his remarks to cover all schools of Japanese Buddhism.

⁷ The *mokushō* ("silent illumination") Zen of the Sōtō sect stresses the practice of zazen alone, without the use of koan. In Hakuin's constant attacks on those who teach this kind of Zen, he often lumps with them Zen teachers of his own Rinzai sect, a considerable number of whom seem to have been followers of Bankei Yōtaku's teaching of the "unborn," which was, among other things, a reaction against the traditional koan study current in the Rinzai sect. See below, fn. 19.

⁸ In the *Records of Rinzai* (*Rinzai-roku*; Chin. *Lin-chi lu*), the recorded sayings and doings of the Tang Zen priest Rinzai Gigen (Chinese, Lin-chi I-hsuan), where these terms appear, "doing nothing" connotes a state of fully achieved enlightenment, the actions of the enlightened person being entirely "purposeless"—he has "nothing to do." Hakuin is criticizing the way these priests merely mouth Rinzai's words.

⁹ The wooden fish (*mokugyō*) is a hollow round wooden drum, beaten while chanting sutras or dharanis. *Namu kara tan nō tora yah yah* are the opening words (or sounds) of the *Daihi enmon bukai jinshu* ("Dharani of the Great Compassionate One"). Being phonetic transcriptions from the Sanskrit, the verbal meaning of the words is largely unintelligible to the person who recites them. Hakuin, playing on a meaning the sounds *Namu kara tan nō tora yah yah* could have in colloquial Japanese, suggests that the priest in repeating the dharani is saying in effect: "Oh (*Namu*), a surplice (*kara*)

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What's earth's foulest thing, from which all men recoil?
Charcoal that crumbles? Firewood that's wet? Watered lamp oil?
A cartman? A boatman? A second wife? Skunks?
Mosquitos? Lice? Blue flies? Rats? *Thieving monks!*

Ahh! Monks! Priests! Are you thieving brigands, every one of you. When I say brigand priest, I mean the 'silent illumination' Zennists who now infest the land.

Where the Zen school is concerned, anyone who has broken through into *kenshō* and left the 'house' of birth-and-death is a 'home-leaver.' It's not someone who merely leaves his parents' house to have his skull shaved. Still, you find people going around making absurd claims: "I've left home. I'm a priest. I'm a priest." Then, as if that weren't bad enough, they proceed to pocket the charity and donations which they hoodwink laymen, the 'stay-at-homes,' into giving them. Doesn't everyone in the world have a home? Don't they all continue to face life's uncertainties and hardships? Why bother using a special name like 'layman' at all?¹⁰

Layman, 'one-who-stays-at-home,' is used in opposition to priest, 'one-who-leaves-home.' His lot is a precarious one, a hard, ceaseless struggle. He works the soil. He plies a trade. He runs a shop. He faces almost constant adversity, with never a moment's relief from the toils of birth-and-death. That is why, from time to time, he offers donations to the priests—to create favorable karmic conditions enabling him to escape from birth-and-death in his future existence.

For his part, a priest, in order to bring benefit to all other beings, raises a great mind of dauntless, burning faith; he breaks through to open up the matchless eye of wisdom, and sees into his own nature; then he keeps his shoulder to the great wheel of Dharma, working ceaselessly to turn it ever forward and lead sentient beings to salvation on behalf of the buddhas and patriarchs.

is all I need (*taru-no!*)"; to which he himself replies: "You'd better watch out! For priests without *kenshō*, who promulgate false doctrines, future existence is more terrifying than a hungry tiger" (*tora* is tiger in Japanese, and *ya ya* may be taken as an exclamation of fear: "Help! Help!"). A *kara* (or *rakusu*) is a symbol of monkhood generally worn by a Zen monk over his chest, hanging around his neck—a kind of abridged *kasa* (*kasaya*) or surplice.

¹⁰ In this paragraph and the next, the meaning turns on the words *shukke* (literally, "home-leaver") and *zaike* ("home-stayer"), the ordinary Japanese words for "priest" and "layman," respectively.

The priest and the layman are thus like the two wheels of a cart, rolling forward in tandem. But today's sad collection of priests, sitting like wooden sticks in the complacent self-absorption of their 'silent illumination,' are not even capable of finding their own ways free of birth-and-death. What possible ability could they possess to help laymen achieve a more favorable karma? Without giving so much as a thought to that, however, they willingly accept donations from their lay followers. Without a single scruple. I ask you, if that isn't brigandry, what is it?

The day their parents sent them from the family home to become Buddhist monks, little could they have dreamed that their children would turn out to be the thieves and brigands you now see. And it's all because of these counterfeit teachers and their false doctrines. They get their hooks into peoples' fine, stalwart youngsters, and they turn them into a pack of blind and hairless dunces. The evil they do is truly immense. Blacker even than the five great sins!¹¹ The preaching of the Buddha's Dharma demands prudence of the greatest order—it is certainly not something anyone should undertake lightly!

During the Shōtoku era, in a certain part of Tōtōmi province,¹² a young girl died, and afterwards appeared to her younger sister to describe the sufferings of hell. "Hold a ceremony on my behalf," she pleaded, "and recite the *Ten Phrase Kannon Sutra* to save me from the dreadful heat of the Hell of Screams."¹³

Someone said, "Not long ago, when you were lying in your coffin during the funeral ceremony, I saw a priest of great virtue come and favor you with an offering of incense. What could have caused you to come to this sorry state?"

"Virtuous priest?" she replied. "Don't make me laugh! He and that endless nonsense about 'do-nothing silent illumination' Zen has led countless young sons and daughters to their ruin. Now he has fallen into hell

¹¹ The five cardinal sins of Buddhism: parricide, matricide, killing a saint, injuring the body of a Buddha, causing disunity in the community of monks. Those who commit these sins fall into the deepest and most terrible level of hell.

¹² Shōtoku: 1711–1716. Tōtōmi: the western part of present Shizuoka prefecture.

¹³ *The Ten Phrase Kannon Sutra (for Prolonging Life)*, (*Emmet*) *Jikku Kannon gyō* 延命十句観音經, consisting of 42 characters and ten phrases. Hakuin devotes a large portion of one of his longest works, *Yaemugura*, to describing the miraculous effects brought about by the recitation of this sutra. The Hell of Screams is one of the eight burning hells.

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for his crimes. He is sure to be down here for a long, long time. He just turned into a cow-demon. Last time I saw him he was pulling a blazing cart of fire. My ill-favored association with him was my own undoing—because of it, I too have ended up in hell.”

There are a great number of people in the world today in situations similar to his girl's. You can find out more about them in Shōsan's *Tales of Cause and Effect*.¹⁴

At the beginning of the Kyōho era, I went in response to an invitation to a certain temple in the province of Kai.¹⁵ A group of temple masters had assembled from surrounding areas for an informal get-together. We sat far into the night, talking freely and openly about matters of the Way. Then, one of the priests, his voice sinking almost to a whisper, said:

An extraordinary event has taken place not far from here. The Shinto priest of a large shrine in this province was possessed by a white fox. In vain he sought relief by offering prayers and pronouncing vows; after exhausting all the secret arts at his command, he was no better off than before.

Now it happened that a nephew of his was the head priest of a Zen temple in Shinano province.¹⁶ He sent a messenger on the long journey to Shinano to give the nephew a full report of the affliction that had befallen him.¹⁷ The nephew was alarmed at the news, and set out immediately for his uncle's shrine. He travelled by fast litter.

The moment he arrived, he went straight to the sick man's room, grasping his bamboo shippei¹⁸ tightly in his fist. Throwing back his shoulders and glaring angrily, he roared out:

“Where have you come from, you wild-fox spirit? Be gone! Leave this shrine at once, or I'll put an end to you and your tricks with a blow of this!”

“Have you any idea who I am?” replied the fox. “No stick that you

¹⁴ *Inga monogatari*, by Suzuki Shōsan (1579–1655), a Zen teacher with ties to both the Sōtō and Rinzai schools, who was also successful as a writer of didactic Buddhist tales. The *Inga monogatari* is a collection of stories similar to this one, compiled and published by Shōsan's disciples in 1654.

¹⁵ Kyōho: 1716–1736. Kai: present Yamanashi prefecture.

¹⁶ Present Nagano prefecture.

¹⁷ Fox possession is usually accompanied by fits of convulsion and great suffering.

¹⁸ A short bamboo slat about a foot and a half long.

ever wield could touch me. I am the high priest so-and-so, from such-and-such province."¹⁹

The moment the priest heard the name that came from the fox's lips, he laid his shippei on the floor, and clasped his hands before him in veneration.

"You were a great Buddhist teacher," he said. "What brought you such a harsh retribution?"

"Many years ago," said the fox, "I made the mistake of preaching a false Dharma. Now I am paying for it."

"A false Dharma?" the priest asked, "What do you mean?"

"Do-nothing, unborn Zen. That (alas!) was the false teaching."

"But 'unborn, undying'—those words are found in the Buddhist sutras. How could that be such a terrible crime? In the scriptural writings preached from the golden mouth of the Buddha himself, the merit of preaching the Dharma is extolled repeatedly. He says, 'Even if you took every material benefit in the myriad-world universe and gave them in charity to all sentient beings, the virtue of a single word of Dharma teaching would be still greater by far.' Why, if sitting undisturbed in the state of the unborn were a transgression against the Dharma, then coughing, spitting, and moving your arms would be too."

"The preaching of the Dharma," the fox replied, "is something one must approach with extreme caution. In former times, because of the sin of uttering just two words—'don't fall'—a priest fell into the body of a wild fox for five hundred lives.²⁰ The word 'unborn' is ten times worse than those words. It takes hold of youths who have left home hungering to penetrate the Buddhist truth and saps their believing minds of their fearlessness and vital energy. One reason that

¹⁹ No doubt a reference to the Rinzai priest Bankei Yōtaku (1622–1693), of Harima province (Banshū). During Hakuin's lifetime, Bankei's followers were especially numerous in central Honshū, a stronghold of the powerful Myōshin-ji branch of Rinzai Zen. For Bankei's teachings, see "A Selection from Bankei's Dialogues," *Eastern Buddhist*, vol. VII, no. 2, Oct. 1975.

²⁰ An allusion to the well-known koan "Hyakujō's Fox" (Case 2 of the *Mumonkan*; Chin., *Wu-men kuan*), with which this story has certain parallels. An old man, hearing Hyakujō's sermon, tells him how, when he was an abbot far in the past, he was asked whether an enlightened man could fall under the sway of cause and effect. He answered that such a man "did not fall," and, as a result, was doomed to a fox existence for five hundred lives.

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I am telling you all this is to atone for these sins of mine—they stand as obstacles in the way of my deliverance.

“By what means have you travelled here, priest? For myself, I am now the god Inari. I’ve taken up residence at a Shinto shrine in the capital.²¹ Recently, I acquired the ability to fly through the air. I don’t walk around on the ground any more because of dogs—dogs give me a great deal of trouble.²² It became necessary for me to be in the eastern part of the country for a short spell on official business. On my way back, I paused here and descended to the ground to have a look around. Then that Shinto priest caught sight of me and began throwing stones. He berated me with some terrible abuse. Before I knew what had happened, I had taken possession of him.”

“You can torment him all you want,” the priest said, “but that won’t rid you of the karma that is hindering you. Release him, please, I beg you. Leave here right away, Work to create conditions that will release you from your own karma.”

“It certainly is a good thing that we forget our previous lives when we are born again! I will submit to your request and release him,” the fox said.

Then he was gone. What an awesome offense it is to preach an impure Dharma!

“An extraordinary story,” I said, as the priest finished his tale. “It should serve an invaluable warning and lesson now in particular, with Zen in its present dismal state of decay. But you must never besmirch the name of the master who was reborn as the fox spirit by revealing his identity. Think of his descendents. Can you imagine for a moment that they would welcome the news of his fate?”

The priests all just sat there, with their hands clasped tightly together before them in *gasshō*. Their cheeks glistened with tears. Their brows glistened with beads of sweat.²³

²¹ Inari is the Shinto rice-deity, popularly known as the fox-deity. The shrine in question must be the famous Fushimi Inari, located south of Kyoto.

²² Dogs are able to sense the fox spirit even when it has assumed human form.

²³ The insinuation seems to be that these priests are themselves followers of the fallen priest’s teachings

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*There is something deeply touching in the autumn leaves falling through the pattering rain. Yet how can it compare with the intimate richness of sunset clouds glowing over fields of bearded grain.*²⁴

Many years back, when this old monk was still a young child, my mother gave me a pat on the head. "Son," she said, as she counted off deliberately on her fingers, "You must always venerate the deity of Kitano."²⁵ You were born on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month, in the second year of Jōkyō, at two in the morning—the first crow of the cock. The year, the month, the day, and the hour all fall under the same sign of the zodiac—the sign of the ox. The twenty-fifth, as everyone knows, is the special day set aside to worship the ox deity."

It seems, then, that I have some inborn affinity with Kitano.

In those days, there was a priest of the Nichiren Sect by the name of Nichigon Shōnin, from a place called Kubokane in Izu, who was widely known for the unsurpassed power of his sermons. Nichigon held a lecture-meeting at the Shōgenkyō-ji, the local Nichiren temple in Hara, taking as his text the letters of Nichiren Shōnin.²⁶ People came from far and near, flocking in like clouds. I was taken by my mother. We heard him describe, in graphic detail, the torments of the eight burning hells. He had every knee in the audience quaking. Their livers froze in icy fear. I was only a small child, but I was surely no exception. My whole body shook with mortal terror.

When I went to bed that night, even in the security of my mother's bosom my mind was in a terrible turmoil. I lay awake sobbing miserably all night, my eyes choked with tears.

One day, mother took me into the bath. She loved to soak herself in a tub of boiling hot water. She wasn't happy unless the servant kept stoking the fire with more and more wood. She made her fan it up into a blazing

²⁴ This is Hakuin's poetical comment on the above. See "Poison Words for the Heart," *Eastern Buddhist*, vol. XIII, no. 2, p. 104.

²⁵ The Kitano Shinto shrine in Kyoto, where the renowned scholar Sugawara Michizane was enshrined in 987 as the patron deity of letters, Kitano Myōjin, or Kitano Tenjin. Michizane is supposed to have been born on the 25th of the second month, and died on the 25th of the sixth month. The twenty-fifth of each month is observed as his death anniversary at the Kitano Shrine in Kyoto, and at the many Tenjin shrines all over Japan. The ox is the sacred animal of Tenjin; hence Tenjin became known, especially in eastern Japan, as "Ushi Tenjin," the ox-deity.

²⁶ Nichiren (1222–1282), founder of the Nichiren Sect.

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inferno. The flames rushed madly up and around, shooting out like angry waves. The water seethed and churned in the tub, making a low, rumbling groan like thunder, and striking a panic of terror into me. I let out howls of distress of such force, they like to have burst the copper bands off the water buckets. People came running in from all directions with looks of great alarm, thinking that something terrible had happened to me. "Did you burn yourself?" "Does your stomach hurt?" voices cried out. My only response was a torrential shed of tears.

One person alone was able to cope with the situation, my elder sister's husband—Maruya Hachirō, I think his name was—who played the part of the peerless champion coming to the aid of the weak and helpless. He grabbed me up and barked into my ear:

"If you must cry, at least let people know the reason why. Bawling away like a hysterical little girl. Come now, tell us what's the matter."

"I'll tell mother," I blubbered. "But no one else. Make all these other people go away."

After the last of them had disappeared into the kitchen, I crouched down in front of mother, folding my arms sheepishly before me, and explained how the deep growling sounds from the bathtub had terrified me.

"I don't see what is so frightening about gurgling water," she said.

"I can't even go into the bath with you, mother, without my knees knocking like this and my blood turning cold. Just think what it will be like when I have to go into the burning hell fires all alone! What will I do? How can I escape! Is there no way? Do I have to wait calmly until death comes? Oh, please, tell me all you know! Have pity on me! Save me! I'm in unbearable agony day and night."

"Well, we can't talk about it here in the bath," she said. "It's too dirty. Tomorrow, we'll find a place where it's nice and clean, then I promise to tell you all you need to know about this important matter of yours."

I was overjoyed! I even got back into the tub again. The women pushed their way into the room, wanting to know "what was ailing the boy."

"No," mother told them, "this young man has something extremely important on his mind."

They laughed. "Look at his face!" they said. "He looks as if nothing had happened. All that fuss for nothing."

Then, their interest in the amusement having faded, they went back to their homes.

That night, I sank into a sound and blissful sleep. My eyes didn't open

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till well after eight o'clock the next morning, far past my customary hour for arising. As I awoke, my ears filled with the clamour of youthful shouts coming from the woods of the Tenjin shrine behind the house. A gang of children—my neighborhood playmates—were crying and screaming in wild excitement. I leaped out of bed and dashed out the door to see what they were up to. They had caught three or four baby crows, and were running and jumping about, battling to see who could strike the hardest blows at them. I started forward, wanting to join in the sport. Then I checked myself. My mind veered back to the house. I remembered that I was going to see mother today. She was going to impart a great secret to me. That must come first. I turned heel and flew back into the house.

I found her having a leisurely chat with an elderly doctor named Ichikawa Dendō. I went and sat behind one of the sliding doors to wait for them to finish. After a while, Gendō appeared. He said goodbye to mother, and then left.

I went to mother, pulling a sour face and scratching at my hair. "Mother," I said, "My hair is bound up too tightly. It hurts. I'm sorry, but would you please fix it again."

"My word, what has got into you!" she said.

The others in the room all echoed her sentiments. "Did you hear what he said? His hair is tangled? 'Please, fix it for me'?" "The next thing you know, the sun will be rising in the west."

But mother had a maidservant fetch the box with the combs in it. She took me to the edge of the room by the veranda. I then told the servant girl that she had to leave the room before we could start. She walked out slowly, casting curious glances back over her shoulder.

When we were alone, I crouched down in front of mother, and said, "I'm sure that there is nobody as sinful as I am, mother. Remember what you promised me last night. If you know of some way that I can escape those burning hell fires, you must tell me and save me from this torment."

"Son," she said, "you know that there is nothing I wouldn't tell you. But let's do your hair first. We can attend to the other matter after."

"No, tell me first," I objected. "Then you may do what you want with my hair. Please, tell me first."

"No," she said, "the hair first, then I'll tell you."

We argued back and forth for a while. Then I stopped and stared hard into mother's face. I thought to myself, "I don't think she really knows how to help me. She saw how troubled I was last night, sobbing

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uncontrollably like that, so she lied to me to make me stop. But if that's her game, I'm going to start another tantrum right now."

Jumping back, I set my jaw in readiness. But at that instant, she stopped me. "Wait a moment, young man. I'll tell you. It's this: *You must always revere the deity of Kitano.*"

Jubilant, I stretched my head forward so that she could comb out my hair. When she had finished, I went to the altar room, hung up the portrait of Tenjin, put some flowers out, made an incense offering, and began to repeat Tenjin's name over and over without stopping. I had the *Tenjin Sutra* by heart that very night.²⁷

Each night after that, I rose at the hour of the ox, lit incense, made my bows before Tenjin, and prayed to him for deliverance from the hell-fires.

These goings-on greatly amused my father. "You little idler, up every night, wasting good lamp oil. A little fellow like you, reciting sutras. What good will it do you?"

"You, sir," interrupted mother, "neglect your own worship. Your son sits there sweetly reciting sutras. Now don't be bothering him!"

At that time, an archery game was enjoying a great vogue among young and old alike; it was played with small toy bows and arrows. Secretly, so as not to be found out, I decided to try my hand at target-shooting too. The sliding doors in our house, covered with paper printed in a chrysanthemum-pattern, presented ready targets. I resolved to score a bull's-eye in one of those flowers. I forgot all else as I gave myself up to the sport.

We had a painting in our house, which had been obtained by my elder brother, depicting the poet Saigyō standing under a willow tree. It was painted by an artist named Ryūi.²⁸ My brother treasured it and always kept it hanging in the tokonoma. Well, somehow or other, an arrow from my bow managed to stray far from the mark. I shot a large hole right through Saigyō's left eye.

When I saw what I had done, my whole body began to tremble with fear. I pressed my palms together tightly before me and appealed to Tenjin to come to my rescue:

Help me, honorable deity of Kitano. I place myself in your hands.

²⁷ There is no *Tenjin Sutra* as such. This must refer to some Shinto prayer, or more probably, to a Buddhist dharani. Hakuin is said to have been chanting the *Daihi Jinshu* (see above, fn. 9) along with the *Kannon Sutra* at this time. *Hakuin Zenji Nempu* (published by the Ryūtaku-ji in Mishima, 1967), p. 10.

²⁸ 柳清. I have been unable to find anything about this artist.

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With your infinite compassion and marvelous vow, protect me. Keep this deed of mine from becoming known.

Meanwhile, as I sweated and squirmed in distress, my brother, unknown to me, quietly returned home. He discovered the damaged picture, grabbed it down from the wall, and rushed with it into mother's room. He laid it down in front of her, and blustered, with his face screwed up in anger, "See what that worthless little rascal of yours has gone and done now!" Then, composing himself somewhat, he stalked from the room and banged out of the house—headed nowhere in particular.

Mother looked thunder at me. But she didn't actually scold me. There I was, blubbing away again, but, inwardly, I was deeply shaken. "Ah," I thought, "You're a rather doubtful kind of divinity, Tenjin. You can't even keep a relatively minor matter like this covered up. How on earth can I rely on you to save me from the burning hells!"

I left my bed that night as usual at about three o'clock, and made the offering of flowers and incense. Then I shut my eyes tightly, clasped my hands together before me, and said,

Great and venerable deity of Kitano. If it is in your power to save me from the burning fires of hell without difficulty, please make the smoke from this incense rise up in a straight line. If you can't help me, make the smoke scatter.

I meditated for a time, my eyes closed, my hands still clasped tightly. I opened my eyes. The smoke from the incense rose up—straight as a string! Ah! I closed my eyes again, contemplating my good fortune. When I opened them this time, however, my heart sank. The smoke was curling and scattering in all directions. I'm afraid my belief in Tenjin's power to save me was badly shaken.

Then I heard that in cases such as mine, when spiritual help was required, none of the Buddhas or Shinto deities could surpass the Bodhisattva Kannon. I promptly set about learning how to recite the *Kannon Sutra*. I had it coming pat on my lips only a few nights later. I recited it assiduously, together with the *Tenjin Sutra*, both day and night. I was never remiss in this practice.

Eventually, though, I began to reflect, "All this sutra-recitation doesn't seem to be doing me much good, despite all the time and effort I put into it. I'm even bothered by the heat of moxa-treatment."

A troupe of puppeteers had arrived in the area. They were playing at a

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place called Suwa. The piece was "The Kettle Hat of Nisshin Shōnin." In it, Lord Tokimune, the Shogun at Kamakura, puts a question to the priest Nisshin.²⁹ "Do people who practice the Lotus find burning fire hot?"

"A true practitioner," replies Nisshin, "can enter a blazing fire and remain untouched; nor can he be harmed when he enters the water."

Tokimune puts it to the test. A ploughshare is heated up in a fire and clamped around under Nisshin's arms. A red-hot cauldron is put over his head. Nisshin suffers through all this with equanimity. He even smiles. The people in the audience were deeply impressed. They took up the chanting of the Daimoku.³⁰

This story started me to thinking: "If one were a priest of Nisshin's calibre, even the fires of hell could be escaped. I too shall become a priest. I shall be just like him."

I informed my mother of my desire to leave the family home at an early date for the life of religion.

"It's admirable the way you are always so worried about going to hell," she said. "I suppose we'll have to let you do what you want."

From then on, I devoted my days to the study of Buddhist sutras. I also read through the *Kuzōshi*, which took me two months.³¹ I started on the twenty-fifth of the ninth month, the eleventh year of Genroku,³² and finished it on the twenty-fifth day of the eleventh month. Here again my affinity with Kitano showed itself.

I first entered the monastery halls to become a monk when I was fourteen. That same spring I was made an attendant of Nyoka Roshi.³³ During this period, I read my way through all five of the Confucian Classics. I studied the *Wen-hsuan* from cover to cover.³⁴ When I turned eighteen, I

²⁹ Nisshin was a Nichiren priest; a practitioner of the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*.

³⁰ The words repeated by followers of the Nichiren Sect, *Namu-myōhōrengekyō*; the "sacred title" (Daimoku) of the *Lotus Sutra*.

³¹ 句雙紙, "Book of Phrases," a classified anthology of short quotations from Buddhist, mostly Zen, sources, and Chinese literature, used by Zen students as *jakugo* or "capping phrases" for koans.

³² 1698.

³³ Another name for the Zen priest Sokudō Fueki 思道普益 (d. 1712), who resided at the Daishō-ji 大聖寺 in Numazu, near Hakuin's home town of Hara. The master whom Hakuin served as attendant from his 14th through his 18th years. *Hakuin Oshō shōden* ("A Detailed Biography of Hakuin Oshō"), edited by Rikugawa Taiun (Sankibo, Tokyo, 1963), pp. 452-4.

³⁴ The Five Confucian Classics: the Book of History, Book of Poetry, Book of

accompanied a senior priest named Kin to Shimizu, where we were admitted as members of the Zensō-ji brotherhood.³⁵ On one occasion, during a lecture, the story of Gantō the Ferryman came up.³⁶ I wanted to learn more about the life of this priest. I got hold of a copy of the *Shōshū-san*,³⁷ and Kin and I read it together on our own. I learned that Gantō had met with a violent death at the hands of bandits.

That discovery caused me great distress. After all, Gantō was said to be the kind of priest who comes along only once in five hundred years. Why, he was one of the great Buddhist figures of the age, a totally enlightened man. If it was possible for someone like that to be assaulted by common bandits while alive, then how could any ordinary monk like me hope to avoid falling into the three evil paths when he died? A Buddhist monk, I concluded, has to be the most useless creature on the face of the earth.

“What manner of divine punishment is being visited upon me! How I rue the day I let them shave my hair off with that razor! What am I now but a sorry, wretched-looking outcast. I can’t possibly return to lay life. I’d be too ashamed. And it would be too demeaning just to go off somewhere by myself to live. In any event, I am at the end of my rope. A total, lamentable failure.”

For a full three days I lay tossing restlessly on my bedding, tormented by these thoughts. I began to waste away, slowly starving there in the monks' quarters. Not so much as a rice-grain would pass my craving throat. It lasted five unbearable days, and through it all, I could not for the life

Rites, Book of Changes, and Spring and Autumn Annals. The *Wen-hsuan* (Japanese, *Monzen*), compiled in the sixth century, is a large classified collection of various types of Chinese literature which was widely read and studied in Japan.

³⁵ This priest's full name was Tōhō Sokin Shuso 東芳祖均首座, a member of the brotherhood at the Tokugen-ji 徳源寺, a Rinzai temple located near Hakuin's home town of Hara. The Zensō-ji 禪叢寺: a Rinzai temple in the city of Shimizu, present Shizuoka prefecture.

³⁶ The head priest of the Zensō-ji was lecturing at the time on the *Kōkofugetsu-shū* (Chin. *Chiang-hu feng-yueh chi*, 江湖風月集), a collection of Zen poetry of the Sung and Yuan dynasties. This story of Gantō Zenkatsu (Yen-t'ou Ch'uan-huo 巖頭全藏, 828–887) is included in one of the notes in a seventeenth century annotated edition of that work (*Hakuin Nempu*, pp. 14–5). During the Emperor Wu's suppression of Buddhism, when many Buddhist monks and nuns were returned to lay status, Gantō continued his teaching as a layman, living as a ferryman at Lake Tung-ting in Hunan. When he was murdered, his death cries were said to be heard for ten miles around.

³⁷ The [*Goke*] *shōshūsan* ([*Wu-chia*] *cheng-tsung tsan* 五家正宗贊), written in the Sung dynasty, gives brief biographies of the important priests of the Five Houses of Chinese Zen.

of me drive those burning hell-fires from my mind. Brooding, pondering my future over and over, cudgeling my brains for an answer, I fell at last into reasoning that if there was no way for me to avoid the three paths³⁸ and hell, I might as well join hands with everyone else. I would take the leap into the flames along with them.

At the same time, I could see that nothing was to be gained by just wasting the rest of my life. I made up my mind to turn to the study of literature and calligraphy. I resolved that I would gain universal praise as one of the master artists of the age. As for my future existence, I would just let matters take their own course. I made my acquaintance with the major writers of the T'ang period, Li Po, Tu Fu, Han Yu, and Liu Tsung-yuan. In calligraphy, I followed the models of Sōnen and Yōsetsu.³⁹

The following year, I set out on a pilgrimage through southern Mino province, having heard of a man named Baō Rōjin,⁴⁰ the incumbent of the Zuiun-ji in the hamlet of Hino, northwest of Ōgaki castle. According to the reports, in the field of letters no one in the present day could compare with him. I travelled in a group with twelve other monks. On arrival, we asked for permission to stay, and, that granted, we took up residence in Baō's temple.

The Zuiun-ji was incomparably poor. Students even had to supply their own rice and firewood. As for old Baō, he was known as the "wild horse of Mino." By nature hard and sharp as flint, he was rough and ruthless to the core—as forbidding as they come. He spued his venom wholesale. Everyone received an equal dole, regardless of their rank or their ability. As a result, the monks I had come with were all soon anxious to escape the old man. They decided to break up and go their separate ways.

I was alone in thinking that another teacher with Baō's wide learning would be hard to find even if I searched the entire country. As for his severity, I wasn't going to let that frighten me off. What rice and firewood I needed, and even luxuries like miso and shoyu, could be managed out of my travelling money—a gift from my mother that I still held in reserve.

³⁸ The realms of the hungry ghosts, fighting demons, and animals.

³⁹ Sōnen 尊円 was a famous calligrapher of the Kamakura period. His style of calligraphy was made standard for official documents in the Tokugawa period. Terai Yōsetsu 寺井養拙 was a leading contemporary calligrapher in Kyoto. Yanagida Seizan, *Hakuin* (Bunjin shofu #9, Tankosha, Kyoto, 1979), p. 70.

⁴⁰ 馬翁老人, "Old Man Baō." Baō Sōchiku (馬翁宗竹 n.d.), an heir of the Rinzaï master Rizan Sōdon 利山宗鈍, and founder of the Zuiun-ji 瑞雲寺. *Hakuin nempu*, p. 16.

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Whatever happened, I felt that there was little cause for worry. I vowed to myself that, even if it should kill me, I wasn't going to leave my new-found teacher.

As the others hurried about readying their travel-packs, yelling and calling out to each other in high spirits, I squatted off by myself next to the well, washing daikon. I was unaware that Baō had come up behind me, until I heard him speak.

"Well, Crane.⁴¹ The birds are taking off in fine fettle, aren't they?"

From there on, through fair weather and foul, it was just the two of us. Whenever it didn't rain, Baō would be off to amuse himself in Ōgaki. So I took to calling him "Fair-weather Baō," whenever the skies were clear. I stayed quietly behind in the temple, devoting myself to my reading. Baō had at the time a disciple named Onbazan,⁴² who was a poet of some repute. He would come by now and then and help me with my Chinese verses. We would start off these sessions by making a hundred verses between us, Onbazan composing the first verse, and I matching it. It never took us very long to accomplish this—about the length of time for a couple of sticks of incense to burn down.

One day, as I was alone in the temple turning things over in my mind, it suddenly dawned on me that even should my verses excel the work of the greatest poets, a Li Po or a Tu Fu, that still wouldn't help me avoid the three evil paths when I died. Now, I sank into a very melancholy state—sadly regretting the situation in which I found myself.

My gaze happened to turn down to the far end of the veranda, where several hundred old books had been stacked, after an airing, on top of an old writing desk. The moment I saw them, I was struck by an indescribable joy. I promptly lit some incense. Then I recited a sutra, made three deep bows, and vowed:

All Buddhas in the ten directions, all gods who stand guard over the Dharma, I place my trust in you. If a way exists that I can practice, a way to devote my life to, I entreat you to make it known to me.

Quietly approaching the desk and shutting my eyes, I stretched out my hand and picked up one of the volumes. After raising it up twice or thrice

⁴¹ Hakuin's other religious name was E-kaku 慧鶴, "Wise Crane."

⁴² Onbazan 蘊(種)馬山; a son of the famous Neo-Confucian teacher Kumazawa Banzan (1619–91). *Hakuin shōden*, p. 16.

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in reverence, I lifted my eyelids and looked. I had chosen a great treasure—the *Zenkan Sakushin*!⁴³ I opened it reverently and looked at the words printed on the page before me. I had turned to a passage that related the great hardships the Chinese priest Jimyō underwent many years ago under Zen master Fun'yo.⁴⁴

The following year, I moved on to the Hofuku-ji in Horato, and joined the assembly under Nanzen Oshō.⁴⁵ Nanzen had composed a verse for the New Year. When I saw it, I improvised one of my own on the spot, employing the same rhymes he had used.

Brandishing the Taia Sword, a fistful of frost,
Summoning springtime back throughout the world;
An auspicious light pervades the abbot's room,
Old Mr South offers up the incense of long life.⁴⁶

I presented this verse to Baō when I returned to the Zuiun-ji. He laughed when he read it. He said, "Your position in the brotherhood is certain to rise before the summer is out."

⁴³ *Ch'an-kuan Ts'e-chin* 禪關策進; "Spurring Zen Students to Break Through the Zen Barrier," by Unsei Shukō (Yun-ch'i Chu-hung, 1535–1615), a Zen priest of the Ming. The work is divided into three parts: excerpts from the sermons and talks of Chinese Zen masters; anecdotes from the Zen records concerned with Zen practice and enlightenment; quotations from various Buddhist sutras relating to meditation study. First printed in Japan in 1656; later republished in 1762 by Hakuin's heir Tōrei Enji.

⁴⁴ The passage in question was quoted in part by Hakuin before (page 73). The full quotation of the Jimyō episode, as it is found in Shukō's text, is:

Jimyō, Kokusen, and Rōya went together to study with Fun'yo. When they arrived, it was bitterly cold east of the river; the freezing weather had frightened away all other practitioners. But Jimyō's aspiration was set firmly on the practice of the Way. He did zazen continually. As he sat through the long nights, whenever he felt sleepy, he would jab himself in the thigh with a gimlet. Afterwards, he succeeded Fun'yo. His vigorous spirit enlivened the Zen world of the time. He became known as the "lion west of the river."

(*Zenkan Sakushin*, edited by Fujiyoshi Jikai, Chikuma, Tokyo, 1970, pp. 153–4.)

⁴⁵ Horato 洞戸 is a village in Mino province, part of present Gifu prefecture. Nanzen Keryō 南禪化竜 (d. 1710), of the Hofuku-ji 保福寺.

⁴⁶ The marvelous Taia sword 太阿 represents the functioning of absolute negation (winter) necessary for affirmation (spring) to appear. Old Mr South (Nangyoku Rōjin 南極老人, the incarnation of the 'southern summit' star, Canopus, in the southernmost regions of the sky, is said to determine human longevity, and to appear as a beacon of peace and prosperity.

That, in fact, turned out to be true. There were sixty men in Nanzen's assembly. Before the year was over, I had become the third-ranking monk. I was twenty years old.

In spring of the next year, a follower of mine by the name of Eshō (later Kairyō of the Genryū-ji) made an appearance at the Zuiun-ji.⁴⁷ He had followed me there by tracing step by step along the path which had brought me to the temple. He arrived without a *sen* to his name, not even any travelling money. The Zuiun-ji, as I have said, was poor in the extreme, so there was no question of allowing him to stay. The best that could be done was to make arrangements to put him up temporarily at a nearby temple. Meanwhile, I went to Obama in Wakasa province to attend some lectures on the *Records of Kidō* to be given by Master Banri.⁴⁸ While there, I took the opportunity to renew some old acquaintances, and to ask whether any of them knew of a temple where a penniless monk might practice. They said they knew of no such temple nearby, but one of them told me of a temple in Matsuyama, Iyo province, called the Shōshū-ji.⁴⁹ The land around the castle was very fertile and the people prosperous. Conditions were thus extremely favorable for a monk with an empty purse. He could live on the donations he obtained from begging.

Upon returning to the Zuiun-ji, I persuaded Eshō to accompany me to the Shōshū-ji. During our stay in Matsuyama, rumours about the monks at the temple for the summer retreat all being men of wide learning reached the ears of a high-ranking military retainer of the ruling clan. This man issued an invitation for five monks from the Shōshū-ji to visit him at his residence for a chat over tea. When the monks were selected, I was included among their number.

We went to his residence, and after the usual words of introduction and other formalities were exchanged, he proceeded to bring out a collection of about ten hanging scrolls. Among them were some calligraphic

⁴⁷ Eshō 惠松 (or Ishō 伊松) Kairyō 夫龍, d. 1747. Originally a brother monk of Hakuin's, he later became his first disciple, afterwards residing at the Genryū-ji 源立寺 in Tadehara, present Shizuoka prefecture. *Hakuin shōden*, p. 142.

⁴⁸ Wakasa: the western part of present Fukui prefecture. Banri Shutetsu 万里須鉄, d. 1713, abbot of the Jōkō-ji 常高寺 in Obama, on the Japan Sea coast. *Kidō-roku* (Chin., *Hsu-t'ang lu*), the records of the Sung priest Kidō Chigu (Hsu-t'ang Chih-yu, 1185-1269), the master of Daiō Kokushi, who founded the line of Rinzaï Zen to which Hakuin belonged.

⁴⁹ 正宗寺, located near Matsuyama Castle in Iyo, present Ehime prefecture.

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inscriptions, which he confessed being unable to read. When the other monks heard that, they all looked in my direction, wreathed in broad grins.

On one of the scrolls the strokes of the characters were written improperly. No matter which way they were read, it was impossible to make out what the inscription said. While the others sat there with puckered brows, scratching their heads in bafflement, I took the scroll and wrote on the back of it the characters for 'mother-in-law' and 'old woman.' Their brows furrowed into frowns, their fists clinched themselves tightly at their sides.

"Now what does that mean?" muttered one. "Very difficult to understand," mumbled another. "Can't make it out at all," said a third. "Please elder monk, leave the absolute for a moment. Come down to our level. Tell us what it means."

"Lowering myself below the cloud-capped summit," I let them in on the meaning. "Those two characters mean—difficult . . . to . . . read. . . ."

They responded with brays of laughter and hand clapping.⁵⁰

There was one scroll kept inside a double nest of wooden boxes and encased in a bag of fine silken brocade. We marvelled reverently as we watched the scroll being taken carefully out for our inspection. It was a piece of calligraphy by Daigu Rōjin.⁵¹ The vigorous brush strokes, the words which were chosen, everything was right and natural, just the way it should be. This, I thought to myself, is the result of truly enlightened activity. That piece of calligraphy meant far more to me than any of the other scrolls—my interest for which immediately vanished.

As soon as I returned to my quarters in the temple, I assembled my small collection of inscriptions and ink paintings—some copybooks of calligraphy that had been made for me, paintings and calligraphy others had done at my request (which I had always treasured), as well as a few

⁵⁰ The monks ask Hakuin to descend to the "second principle," i.e., to explain things to them using "expedient means," or *upaya* (the following "cloud-capped summit" is a Zen term for the absolute or first principle). What Hakuin "reveals" to them, however, is the pun he has just made: He first writes the characters *ko* 姑, "mother-in-law," and *ba* 婆, "old woman." He then explains them, playing on the words *yome-nikul*, which mean, with the characters he now uses, 嫁悪, "enmity toward the daughter-in-law" (a meaning suggested by the previous "old mother-in-law"), but which he says means "difficult to read," *yomi-nikui*.

⁵¹ Daigu Sōchiku 大愚宗策 (1584–1669), a major figure in the Rinzai sect during the previous century. He is most closely associated with the Daian-ji, which he founded in the city of Fukui.

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specimens of my own brushwork. Bundling them up, I carried them out to one of the egg-shaped pagodas in the cemetery and set fire to them, watching as the flames burned them to ashes.

From then on, I devoted myself to my practice with a new and merciless vigor. I took the *Zenkan Sakushin* as my master. Perusing the *Busso Sankyō*,⁵² I came upon a passage that made me leap up with joy the instant I saw it. It compared the practitioner of the great vehicle to a log that floats down a river, never touching at either bank, until it finally reaches the great ocean.

In the spring, at the urging of an erstwhile brother-disciple of mine, I travelled to Fukuyama and joined the brotherhood at the Tenshō-ji.⁵³ While there, by virtue of hard and continuous practice, I entered a cave of pitch darkness—when I walked, I didn't even know that I was walking. Autumn came. I set out for home with a party of fellow monks.

We skirted the seaside of Maiko, and the shores of Suma, passed the burial mound of the poet Hitomaru, and the grave of Atsumori. We walked through the fields of Koyano and beside the woods of Ikuta.⁵⁴ But my eyes were not open to any of those famous sites. All the way home, it seemed to me as though I was not moving forward at all, but standing alone; the people, the houses, the roadside trees, all seemed to be moving westward.

It took about a fortnight to reach home. My family and my relatives and friends all gathered to welcome me. They were anxious to hear me tell them about all the difficulties, the good fortunes and bad, I had experienced during my absence. But an unresponsive series of grunts, "Uh," "Uh," was all they got for their questions. Bewildered, they accused me of having changed. I had become "a strange fellow."

⁵² *Fo-tsu san-ching* 佛祖三經, "Three Sutras of the Buddha-patriarchs." A composite of three separate works, the *Sutra of Forty-two Sections*, the *Sutra of the Buddha's Final Instructions*, and *Kuei-shan's* (Japanese, *Isan's*) *Keisaku*, dating from the late T'ang or early Sung, containing basic Zen teachings for the use of monks and laymen engaged in meditation practice. The quotation in question occurs in the *Sutra of Forty-two Sections*, section 26.

⁵³ The Tenshō-ji 天祥寺 in Fukuyama, Bingo province (in present Hiroshima prefecture), midway on the Inland Sea coast between Okayama and Hiroshima.

⁵⁴ Sites famous in Japanese literature for their scenic beauty and historical associations, located along the coast of the Inland Sea in the general area of the modern city of Kobe.

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But my behavior at this time agrees with that described in the traditional accounts that have been passed down about other Zen practitioners. The National Master Shōō,⁵⁵ for example, is said to have travelled the entire length of the Great Eastern Highway twenty times without once ever looking up to notice Mount Fuji as he passed. I can remember the deep and lasting impression that story made on me when I first heard it.

Some time after that, I came upon a passage in the *Zenkan Sakushin* about a voice that arose in mid-air and addressed Jōtai Bodhisattva, telling him that as he walked he was not to look to the right or left, up or down, or in any of the four quarters.⁵⁶ I have trusted in those words ever since. They have been just like a koan to me. That's the reason I've become such a foolish fellow!

It was about then, that news reached me of a Zen seeker in Echigo who had received inka from Egoku Oshō,⁵⁷ I knew that a series of lectures on the *Ninden Ganmoku*⁵⁸ was going to be held soon in Echigo, at the Eigan-ji. Using that as a pretext, when spring came, I went with three other monks to attend the meeting. The first thing I did when I arrived was to seek the priest out. We had a long discussion, which gave me an opportunity to observe the depth of his understanding, and to find that he was not the enlightened man he had been made out to be.

Disappointed, I shut myself up inside the ancestral shrine of the pro-

⁵⁵ Daijō Shōō Kokushi 大定聖應, one of the posthumous titles of Kanzan Egen 關山慧玄, 1277–1360, the greatly respected founder of the Myōshin-ji in Kyoto.

⁵⁶ The passage occurs at the beginning of the third book. It is a quotation from the *Larger Prajna paramita Sutra*:

"A voice arose in mid-air, declaring to Sadāpralāpa (Jōtai) Bodhisattva, 'As you travel eastward from here in your search for wisdom, you must harbor no aversion to fatigue in your mind. Do not think of sleep, or of food or drink. Do not concern yourself with day and night. Have no fear of heat or cold. Do not scatter your mind after things, inside or out. When you walk, do not look to the left or right. Do not look forward or backward, up or down, or to any of the four directions.'" *Zenkan Sakushin*, *ibid*, pp. 180–1.

⁵⁷ Egoku Dōmyō 慧極道明, 1624–1713? a leading disciple of Mokuan Shōtō (Chinese, Mu-an Hsing-t'ao), the second patriarch of the Ōbaku Zen school, which had been introduced into Japan in the seventeenth century. The Eigan-ji 英巖寺 in Takada, Echigo (present Niigata prefecture) was the family temple of the Toda, the daimyo of Echigo and lords of Takada castle.

⁵⁸ In Chinese, the *Jen-t'ien yen-mu* 人天眼目, "The Dharma Eye of Men and Gods," by the Sung Rinzai priest Maigan Chishō (Chinese, Hui-yen Chih-chao). It sets forth the basic teaching styles of the Five Houses of Chinese Zen through selected passages from the sayings and verses of their principal figures.

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vincial lords which was located just behind the temple. I vowed to fast for seven days and concentrate singlemindedly on zazen. No one in the temple was aware of what I was doing; the monks I had come with decided to pretend that I had quietly left and gone home.

It was in the middle of the night—twelve sharp—when the sound of a distant bell reached my ears. My body and mind dropped completely away. I transcended even the finest dusts. Beside myself with joy, I cried out at the top of my lungs, “*Old Gantō is alive and well!*”

Hearing my yells, my companions came running from the monks' quarters. We joined hands, as they shared with me the intense joy of that moment.

Afterwards, I was possessed by a feeling of enormous pride. All the people I saw seemed like so many lumps of dirt.

Five hundred monks had gathered at the Eigan-ji to participate in the lecture-meeting. They were all housed together in the monks' hall, under extremely cramped conditions. The guest hall of a neighboring temple belonging to the Sōtō sect had to be borrowed and put to use as a separate, detached residence.

Some thirty monks were sent to be quartered in this hall. I went as one of the senior monks. Seven or eight other senior monks were there with me. One of them, a priest named Dan (later Abbot Kyōsui of the Rinzaï-ji) was placed in charge.⁵⁹

While we were there, Dan came back hurriedly from the main temple announcing excitedly the arrival of an extraordinary new monk.

“He's over six feet tall. Dreadful looking face. He stood there like a withered tree, with a gigantic pilgrim's staff under his arm, asking for admission to the temple in a loud Bandō accent.⁶⁰ I tell you, he's no ordinary monk. I don't think someone like that should be allowed to stay.”

Looks of undisguised disapproval showed on the faces of the other senior monks as well. Shortly afterward, Dan came scurrying back once again.

“They had a discussion back at the temple,” he declared. “They have

⁵⁹ Kyōsui Edan 鏡水慧団 of the Rinzaï-ji 臨濟寺, in the present city of Shizuoka. According to Rikugawa Taiun, he later became an heir of Shōju Rōjin. *Hakuin shōden*, pp. 70-4.

⁶⁰ Bandō refers to the region of eastern Honshū, of which Edo was the center.

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decided to send him over here to us. They seem to think this is some place to dispose of all their misfits and trouble-makers."

I scolded him. "What do you think you're doing? Shilly-shallying around, gathering up worthless bits of information and passing them on to others. Instead of stirring up the minds of all your brother monks, why don't you have a look at the *Ninden Ganmoku*, so you'll be prepared for the lectures."

Just then, the first senior priest from the main temple (it was the person I had come to Echigo to meet) appeared. He brought the suspect monk with him. In an earnest, obliging manner, he announced,

"This man is a new arrival. He has come to us from Shinano province.⁶¹ He has been assigned to the last position on the temple roster. We have had him doing some sweeping and cleaning. It has been decided to send him here to you. We request that you afford him the benefit of your guidance. . . ."

I spoke up. "I don't know why you bring him here. We already have that fellow Giseki, and six or seven other rascals like him. They are notorious hall-smashers. This building we're using it not even ours. It has been borrowed from another sect. Don't you think it would be better to send respectable monks here? However well-mannered this fellow may appear at the moment, he's a rogue monk. A known trouble-maker."

"But it has already been decided by the temple," he said.

"In that case," I replied, "we will bow to that decision. But the first sign of any irregular behavior from him, and he goes right back to you. Is that agreeable?"

He assured us that there would be no objection. That concluded the business, and he departed.

The opening of the lecture-meeting went off without a hitch. Monks were going about the hall congratulating one another. The first senior monk came by to express his compliments too; then he picked up a copy of the *Ninden Ganmoku* that was lying nearby. Turning the pages, he pointed to some places in the text and addressed questions to several of the monks around him. "What was the head priest's interpretation of this passage?" he asked one. "How about here. How do you explain this?" he asked another. After examining a few passages with them in this way, he left. When

⁶¹ Present Nagano prefecture.

he was gone, the new monk said,

“Was that a senior monk?”

“What business is it of yours?” I replied.

“I grant that he showed some understanding,” he said. “But his interpretation of this passage here certainly wasn’t sound.”

I then asked him to say something about one or two of the passages himself. He proceeded to explain them, one by one, with great clarity and discernment.

The judgment that the monks in the hall had formed of the man (who turned out to be called Kaku)⁶² underwent a sudden and radical change. Now, they sat trembling apprehensively in hushed silence. There had been some other monks coming around, dispensing freely of their personal views and opinions, but they too grew suddenly timid. They didn’t show their faces any more.

To me, however, it was like fresh rain after a long drought. Or like meeting an old and trusted friend from my native place. We spent all our time from that moment on, both day and night, debating the matter of our common interest. I could not have asked for a greater pleasure.

All too soon, the evening of the final lecture arrived, time for us to leave. I called Kaku to me in private and asked him to tell me about his teacher.

“He’s an old hermit-priest who lives at the Shōju-an in Iiyama. His name is Tan Zōshu,”⁶³ he said.

I secretly longed to go to Iiyama myself and play my respects to the old man.

“Just what I was hoping you would propose,” said Kaku, when I asked him what he thought of the idea. “If you go, I’ll go with you.”

Next day, we waited for the bell to announce the close of the meeting, then we slipped unnoticed out the gate of the Sōtō temple. We made our

⁶² Dōjū Sōkaku 道樹宗覺 (Hakuin gives 格 for 覺), 1679–1730. *Hakuin shōden*, pp. 64–70.

⁶³ 煇藏主: Dōkyō Etan 道統慧端, 1642–1721. Born in Iiyama, in the province of Shinano (present Nagano prefecture), he studied Zen under Shidō Munan in Edo. He refused Munan’s request to stay on as his successor, and returned to Iiyama, remaining the rest of his life at the Shōju-an 正受庵, a small mountain temple in Narasawa 奈良沢 (the text has 橋沢), one of the small villages into which Iiyama was divided (*Hakuin shōden*, p. 464). A biographical sketch of Shōju Rōjin (“the old man of the Shōju [hermitage]), the name by which he is best known, may be found in *Zen Dust*, Sasaki and Miura, Tokyo, 1966, pp. 213–215.

way across the pass at Mount Tomikura, and from there we proceeded to Iiyama. Once at the master's hermitage, I requested permission to be admitted as a student, and we hung up our travelling staffs to stay.

I related my understanding to the master one day during *dokusan*.⁶⁴ He said to me,

"Commitment to the study of Zen has to be a true commitment. What about the dog and the Buddha-nature?"⁶⁵

"There's no way at all for hand or foot to touch it," I replied.

He suddenly reached out, grabbed my nose in his hand, and gave it a sharp push. "How's that for a firm touch!" he declared.

I was incapable of moving forward. I couldn't retreat. I couldn't spit out a single syllable.

After that, I was totally disheartened and frustrated. I sat red-eyed and miserable. My cheeks burned from the constant tears.

The master took pity on me. He gave me some koans to work on: Sozan's Memorial Tower, the Ox Comes Through the Window, the Death of Nansen, Nansen's Flowering Shrub, Seishū's Hemp Robe, and Ummon's Dried Shit-stick.⁶⁶

"If you can get past one of these," he said, "you are worthy to be called a descendent of the Buddhas and patriarchs."

A great new upsurge of spirit rose inside me. With stiffened resolve, I chewed on those koans day and night, attacking them from the front, gnawing at them from all sides. But not the faintest glimmer of understanding came. Tearful and dejected, I sobbed out a vow,

Evil kings of the ten directions. Demons of good and demons of evil.
I call upon you all. If after seven days I fail to pass through one of these koans, come quick and snatch my life away.

Then I lit some incense, made my bows, and resumed my practice. I didn't stop for sleep. The master came and shouted abuse at me. I was

⁶⁴ Personal interview with the master.

⁶⁵ That is, "Jōshū's Mu" (case 1 of the *Mumonkan*; Chin, *Wu-men kuan*), the koan given to Zen students at the beginning of their practice.

⁶⁶ The Ox Comes Through the Window, Nansen's Flowering Shrub, and Ummon's Dried Shit-stick, are found in the *Mumonkan* koan collection; the others, except Seishū's Hemp Robe, appear in the *Kattō-shū* 葛藤集, a pocket-sized book of koans the Zen student always carried on his person for use in koan study.

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doing "Zen-down-a-hole," he said. Then he told me,

"You could go out and scour the whole world for a teacher who could raise up the fortunes of 'closed-door' Zen,⁶⁷ but you'd never find one. You'd as soon see the morning star at noon."

I had my doubts about that. "After all," I reasoned, "there are great monasteries all over the place. Celebrated masters reside in them—they're numerous as sesame or flax. That old man in his wretched ramshackle old poorhouse of a temple—and that preposterous pride of his! I'd be better off leaving here for some other temple."

Still deeply dejected, I took up my begging bowl early the next morning and went into the village below Iiyama castle. My mind was hard at work on my koans. It never left them. I stood before the gate of a house, my bowl in my hand, lost in a kind of trance.

A voice from within yelled, "Go on! Go somewhere else!" But I was so preoccupied I didn't even notice it. This must have angered the resident of the house, because she suddenly appeared, flourishing a broom upside-down in her hand. She flew at me, flailing out wildly, whacking away at my head as if she was bent on dashing my brains out. My sedge hat lay in tatters. I was knocked down and ended heels up on the ground. I lost consciousness and lay there like a dead man.

All the neighbors, alarmed by the noise, appeared with apprehensive looks on their faces. "Oh, now look what that crazy old crone has done!" they cried, and vanished behind locked doors. There was total silence, not a stir or sign of life anywhere. Some people who happened to be passing by approached me in wonderment. They grabbed hold of me and propped me right side up.

"What's wrong!" "What happened?" they exclaimed.

As I regained consciousness, my eyes opened, and as they did, I found that the unsolvable and impenetrable koans I had been working on—all those poisoned cat's paws—were completely penetrated. Right to the root. They had suddenly ceased to exist. I clapped my hands and laughed great shouts of laughter, frightening the people who had gathered around me.

"He's lost his mind." "A crazy monk," they shouted, and shrank back from me. They turned heel and ran off without looking back.

⁶⁷ *kansa Zen* 閉門禪. Shōju implies that, unlike other Zen masters of the day, he keeps the Zen barrier tightly locked up, making it impossible for any but the truly enlightened to pass through it.

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I picked myself up from the ground, straightened my robes, and fixed the remnants of my hat back on my head. With a blissful smile on my face, slowly and exultantly I began to walk back toward Narasawa.⁶⁸ As I did, I saw an old man beckoning to me.

"Honorable priest," he said. "You were really knocked out back there."

I gave him a faint smile, but spoke not a word in return. He offered me something to eat and drink, and sent me on my way.

I smiled elatedly all the way back through the gates of Shōju's hermitage. The master was standing on the veranda. He took one look at me, and said, "I see that something good has happened to you. Try to tell me about it."

I advanced to where he was standing, and related at length what I had come to realize. He took his fan and stroked my back with it.

"I hope you live to be my age," he said. "Firmly resolve never to be satisfied with little, and devote your efforts now to after-satori practice. Those who content themselves with a small attainment never advance beyond the stage of the *shravakas*. If you are ignorant of after-satori practice, you will end up without fail as one of those unfortunate lesser-vehicle arhats, whose rewards are paltry indeed. I'd rather that you be reborn into the mangy old body of a fox than ever for you to become a priest of the two vehicles."⁶⁹

"By 'after-satori' practice, I mean you must proceed on beyond your satori and devote yourself to further practice; and, when that bears fruit, continue still further. As you go on, you will arrive at a final, difficult barrier.

"What is required is concealed practice and secret application, continued without interruption—that is the essence within the essence. The groups you find nowadays, prating on about the unborn and sitting like

⁶⁸ The village in Iiyama where the Shōju-an was located. See fn. 63.

⁶⁹ The followers of the two vehicles, the *shravakas* and the *pratyeka* (or *private*) *Buddhas*, achieve attainment of enlightenment, but, according to the Mahayana view espoused by Hakuin, they remain there, savoring their realization, and do not, like the Mahayana Bodhisattvas, endeavor to lead others to enlightenment while deepening their own attainment.

The final sentence of this paragraph comes from an admonishment the Buddha is said to have given his disciples.

⁷⁰ *sengō mitsuyō* 潛行密用.

tree stumps in 'silent illumination,' are a worse bunch than those rotten foxes, the whole lot of them!

"What is 'concealed practice and secret application'? Well, I don't mean going off to some mountain and sitting there on a rock or under a tree like a piece of wood 'quietly illuminating' yourself. This is something you are totally immersed in, without a moment's interruption or pause, in all your daily activities—walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. That is why it is said that practice concentrated in activity is a hundred thousand times superior to practice performed in a state of inactivity.

"If, after your satori, your practice is devoted singlemindedly to the extracting and disposing of the poison teeth and talons of the cave of Dharma, to ripping to shreds your vicious life-robbing talismans;⁷¹ to combing through all written texts, Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike, and piling up a goodly store of Dharma-wealth, to whipping forward the wheel of the four great vows, striving every minute of your life to revolve the great Dharma, pledging yourself to benefit and save all sentient beings, while having nothing—*nothing*—to do with fame or self-profit in any shape or form—then you will be a true and legitimate descendant of the Buddha-patriarchs. It is an even greater reward than being born as a man or a deva.

"*Worldly blessings are a curse in the three periods.*"⁷² Is there any doubt about it? Great numbers of men and women seek advantageous rebirth in the next life. They all want to achieve Buddhahood. To enter the Pure Land. They observe a strict life of purity. Uphold the precepts to the letter. Recite sutras and copy them down over and over. They hold services for the Buddhas. They give alms to the priests. They worship them with deep bows of reverence. At Chichibu, Bandō, in western Japan and Shikoku, Nara, and Mount Kōya,⁷³ they perform good deeds by the thousands, avail themselves of every secret art known to man. But so long as they

⁷¹ The "poison teeth and talons of the cave of Dharma" (*hokkutsu no doku sōge*), and the following "vicious life-robbing talismans" (*datsumyō no aku shimpū*) are expressions, parallel in meaning, descriptive of the severe, uncompromising nature of the wisdom and spiritual power attained by the enlightened Zen practitioner, which "kills" or negates all it encounters, even Buddhas and patriarchs; but which must itself also be cast aside, in order for the total freedom of mature enlightenment, characterized by the full emergence of the compassionate desire and activity to save all beings, to appear.

⁷² This seems to be a popular saying.

⁷³ Centers of Buddhism located throughout the country.

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haven't attained the Way in the experience of kenshō and heard the sound of the single hand,⁷⁴ they aren't even close to Buddhahood. The most fleeting glimpse of the Pure Land remains totally beyond them. That's the reason worldly blessings are said to be a curse in the three periods.

"What about this present life? The countless hardships that you endure, the countless good deeds that you perform? On the strength of these, you assure yourself of being born in a future life as a prince, a gallant general, a powerful lord, or the head of some distinguished family. There are riches and high rank for you to use at will. Power at your fingertips. You exult in all that wealth and power.

"How fortunate, indeed, that with each new birth the past is completely forgotten! All the numberless good deeds and good actions you have performed in your former life disappear like dewdrops in the sun. You gather an assortment of beautiful women for your wives, nubile concubines for you to embrace. There are servants and vassals in numbers that you cannot even count at your beck and call. There are fine purple skirts for wife Chang, and stockings of precious gauze for concubine Li. The coffers of your treasury do not suffice to cover costs like these, so you covet the property of others, plunder throughout the land, squeezing the people till they are dry, grinding the poor to powder, oppressing and causing untold suffering.

"Piling up evil deeds one on top of another in such abundance, when you die you are certain to find yourself bound for an evil destination. You will fall into one of the three paths, or else be reborn into one of the eight difficult realms,⁷⁵ where endless suffering and torment awaits you. Could anyone say, in the face of this, that worldly blessings are not a curse in the three periods?"⁷⁶

A monk standing nearby said, "Worldly blessings are only a problem for laymen. Surely they couldn't have any bearing on you once you have entered the priesthood."

⁷⁴ The famous koan Hakuin devised to give to Zen students at the start of their practice.

⁷⁵ The eight conditions or realms of rebirth in which it is difficult to see a Buddha or hear his teachings.

⁷⁶ This quotation (which begins nine paragraphs above) represents Hakuin's own approximation of Shōju's words, mixed with obvious elements of his own teaching (e.g., the sound of one hand). Along the way, he seems to forget that he is speaking as Shōju; below, in order to answer the monk's question, he drops his mask and answers as himself.

"Of course they do," I said. "They do, but I'm afraid to enter into that here. It would involve telling stories about other priests."

"Then how can a priest avoid the evils of these worldly blessings?" he asked.

"To begin with," I said, "he must attain *kenshō*—see into his own nature and achieve the Way. If he wants to see his own nature, he must first hear the sound of one hand."⁷⁷ But once he hears it, he must not be satisfied with that. He must next 'put a stop to all sounds,'"⁷⁸ and pass all the other unsolvable, impassable koans, one by one. Even then, a final, difficult barrier still remains."

"But after you attain *kenshō* and enter the Way of enlightenment," he said, "surely there's no evil at all to obstruct you then, is there?"

"No! If you create it, it exists! If you don't create it, it doesn't."

"But matters like that can wait until after you have attained the Way. It is not too late then. You can turn to yourself for judgments about them. In particular, there is the discernment of the three kinds of succession. That is something you must know about."

"Would you tell me about them?" he asked.

I replied, "An ancient said that a superior man succeeds his enemy, a mediocre man succeeds his benefactor, and an inferior man succeeds a man of power."⁷⁹

The "enemy" is he whose rigorous scoldings and angry fists rob you of your very heart and liver, all your vital organs of life. Who is he if not an enemy!

The benefactor and the man of power need no special mention. Even here, among the students under my own mallet, are found a great many of the mediocre and inferior types. I'm to blame for it; it's my shortcoming and my transgression, not theirs. If I were ensconced in a position of great power and influence, don't think they would submit sweetly to being mediocre or inferior! There are some among them who will succeed to their benefactors, because the teachers who raised and educated them will tell them to do so, and they will be unable to refuse.

Take my case. One day, while I was at Iiyama, the old master summoned me to him. He said:

⁷⁷ See above, footnote 74.

⁷⁸ Another koan.

⁷⁹ The 3 Successions: *sanshi* 三嗣. I have been unable to trace this quotation.

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"I know that this is a poor mountain temple. In future, however, after I have left on my final pilgrimage, I want you to come and spend the rest of your days here."

"But you are fortunate in already having a senior monk like Kaku," I replied.

His answer to this was, "I can't depend on him." At the time, the significance of this remark was lost on me. It seemed a strange thing for him to say. Not many years after that, however, Kaku died suddenly.⁸⁰ I realized then for the first time the terrible penetration of old Shōju's eye. It's a shame that I did not succeed to my enemy and become a superior man.

What is to be valued above all else is the practice that comes after satori. What is this practice? Its first and foremost element is the mind of enlightenment.

Many years ago, the great deity of the Kasuga shrine appeared to Gedatsu Shōnin of Kasagi. "Since the time of the Buddha Kuruson," he said, "every wise and eminent priest who has lacked the mind of enlightenment has, without exception, fallen into the paths of evil."⁸¹

For years, I was constantly troubled by this. How strange! Was a shaven head and a priest's robe not the mind of enlightenment? Was reciting sutras and mantras not the mind of enlightenment? Not to mention all those wise and eminent priests throughout the past—the idea that such men could have lacked the mind of enlightenment! Yet the divine message from the august lips of the deity of Kasuga was certainly not to be taken lightly!

⁸⁰ Actually, Kaku didn't die until twenty-one years later; perhaps the idea here is not that Shōju was foreseeing Kaku's impending death; rather he knew that with a weak constitution, Kaku would not be able to give himself fully to the hardships of continued practice.

⁸¹ The Kasuga (Shinto) Shrine, located in the city of Nara, is one of the most important in Japan. Gedatsu Shōnin 解説上人, the posthumous title of Jōkei 貞慶 (1132–1186), a famous Hossō scholar-priest. He resided at the Kōfuku-ji in Nara, later retiring to Mount Kasagi in the province of Yamashiro (southern Kyoto prefecture). Kuruson (Sanskrit, Krakucchandha) Buddha, is the first of the thousand Buddhas who appear in the course of the present kalpa in which we live.

According to the *Hakuin nempu* (p. 41), Hakuin read about this oracle in the *Shaseki-shū* ("A Gathering of Sand and Pebbles"; a widely-read collection of Buddhist stories written by the priest Mujū Ichien in 1279), and was extremely frightened by it. The story concerning Gedatsu Shōnin that appears in that work, however, bears little resemblance to the one Hakuin relates below.

Doubts about this first arose in my mind when I was twenty-five years old. They remained there until I was forty-two. Then, at long last, I pierced through into this great matter. Suddenly, unexpectedly, I saw it. It was as clear as if it was in the hollow of my hand. What is the mind of enlightenment? It is, I realized, a matter of doing good—benefitting others by giving them the gift of the Dharma.

I pledged that, henceforth, I would drive forward the wheel of the four great vows. And now, although I have already lived over four score of years, never have I been remiss in carrying out that pledge. I go wherever I am asked—fifty, a hundred leagues, it doesn't bother me in the least. I work as much and as hard as I can to teach people the Dharma. How strange, indeed, that nowhere in the Buddhist teachings or records of the patriarchs have I ever read anything that offered such a discernment of the mind of enlightenment. How fortunate it was for me, then, that the great deity of Kasuga, in an oracle of a few short sentences, succeeded so wonderfully in transcending all the sutras and commentaries! My joy was almost unbearable.

Without reading it over to check for mistakes, I will put down the basic outlines of the story. Perhaps it too will be a small contribution of Dharma from the mind of enlightenment.

Many years ago, when Myōe Shōnin was in seclusion from the world at Toganoo,⁸² and Gedatsu Shōnin resided at Kasagi, confined by the government to house arrest, they went from time to time to the Kasuga Shrine in Nara to perform services on behalf of the Kasuga deity. When Myōe paid his visits, the deity opened up the doors to the shrine's inner sanctuary and conversed with him in pure talk which extended over all the Buddhist sutras and commentaries.

When Gedatsu appeared, the doors were opened for him as well, but the deity turned his back on him and did not engage him in pure talk. Gedatsu was both downhearted and bewildered.

"What difference is there between my learning and religious practice and Myōe's?" he asked. "While you deign to talk with Myōe whenever he comes here, you turn your back on me. What does it mean? Is it not counter to the vow you yourself have made, that

⁸² Myōe Shōnin (1173–1232); another celebrated priest of the Kamakura period. Mount Toganoo is situated in the mountains northwest of the city of Kyoto.

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you would extend your benefits universally, to save all beings?"

The deity addressed Gedatsu in a loud voice of extreme sublimity, "You are able to see my back *because* of your achievements in learning. But your lack of the mind of enlightenment is a constant disappointment to me." He then returned to the heavens.

Sad and downcast, Gedatsu rose and left. Returning to his room, he read far into the night, holding up a lamp for light. It grew late. Everyone had retired. Everything was still. Suddenly, the silence was broken by the sounds of a great commotion. It came from outside the room. Summoning his courage, Gedatsu approached the window. His body was tense with fear. He poked a small hole in the paper window with his finger, and peered out into the darkness.

Terrifying apparitions, spectre shapes with cow-like heads and horse-like faces, were milling about in a fury of confusion, biting and lunging and grabbing at each other in a wild frenzy—it was like some agonized scene from the realm of the fighting spirits.

Gedatsu's whole body shook uncontrollably with terror. Cold shivers shot up and down his spine. His hairs stood on end. He then noticed an aged monk, standing near him in a solemn trance. He spoke to him through trembling lips.

"What are those monstrous creatures out there?"

The old monk spoke. "Those depraved, fiendish beings—ah! you can be sure that they are up to no good. It is a serious transgression even to talk about them. But since you have asked, it can't be helped. I will tell you their story very simply.

"They were every one of them wise and celebrated priests who lived after the time of the Buddha Kuruson. Because they did not possess the mind of enlightenment, they fell into the evil paths. Their names are all perfectly well known, yet it would be a terrible wrong on my part to mention them to you now.

"You might practice continuously, you might press on even until Miroku Buddha comes to earth infinitely far in the future. You might experience great enlightenment, acquire vast knowledge and wisdom, so that you excell millions of other seekers. And yet, for all that, if you fail to encounter a clear-minded teacher, you will never learn about after-satori practice—how much less are your chances of discovering the precious mind of enlightenment!

"Those demons are always there. They are waiting their chance day

and night, for they mean to have you in there with them. Still, they don't find it such an easy job to pull you in, because you have shown an occasional spark of sympathy and compassion in the past in offering younger students your guidance. However, I expect before too long you may find yourself pulled in there among them anyway.

Gedatsu asked, "Where are you from, good priest? I haven't seen you here before."

"I live close by," he replied. "Around the fields of Kasuga. I came here on your account. But it would not be good for me to remain much longer. It would be lacking in refinement to continue talking until dawn. So I will bid farewell to you now."

With that, he mounted a white cloud and flew off in the direction of Kasuga, leaving Gedatsu with a feeling of profound gratitude.

About that time, several of the monks whom I had parted with back at the Eigan-ji came to Iiyama looking for me. They wanted me to return home with them. Otherwise, they declared, they intended to remain in Iiyama with me. As I was debating which of the two alternatives to choose, unable to arrive at a decision, a letter arrived from home informing me that Nyoka Roshi was bedridden with a serious illness. The news took me by surprise, and saddened me. I decided to set out for home without delay. The three monks who had been waiting on my decision were delighted to be going home. They promptly set about readying their travelling packs.

Three or four laymen, men with whom I had formed a close comradeship in the long months we had practiced together, came to see us off. They were accompanied by the roshi himself. They walked along with us for a couple of leagues, until we reached the foothills of the high mountains. At that point, the mountain path rose steep and rugged, making it impossible for the old roshi to continue any farther.

After words of encouragement had been exchanged, and we were about to part, the master took my hand in his. He said to me, with a fatherly familiarity,

"If you continue your practice and go on to produce men like yourself, you will repay in full measure your profound debt to the Buddhas and patriarchs. Even though you leave here and devote yourself to the care of your sick master, do not be satisfied with a small attainment. Now you must concentrate yourself assiduously on your after-satori practice. Throw aside all connections with the world's dusts, however slight. Vow never

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to give them the least concern. If you have a chance, come back and visit my small hermitage again, and bring your questions with you.”

He had already finished speaking, and was gone. But I was still bowed down in reverence, my forehead pressed to the earth. As I began to ascend the winding mountain path that took me farther and farther away from him, my eyes were filled with tears.

This brings me to the close of the first volume.

There is still more, however, another batch of verses left to be written. I will just put the words down as they come into my head, without even giving them a second look.

*The thirteenth of the twelfth month (the day of the year-end house-cleaning), winter, the second year of Meiwa (1765)*⁸³

Having been led by circumstances to compose this long string of clumsy verses, I now find that I have three full chapters of the stuff. I started out writing on the thirteenth of the twelfth month. I laid down my brush on the twenty-fifth, just before year's end (when "even the teachers have to run").⁸⁴ In that short span of thirteen days, I scribbled down all these idle words. The first book runs to seventy-two pages of manuscript. The second to sixty-one. And the last, I see, is fifty pages. This makes a sum total of one hundred and seventy-nine sheets of paper; over two thousand five hundred verses; eighteen thousand Chinese characters. Not one word or phrase of it is better than feeble and shoddy; but, as bad as it is, it is, nonetheless, a Dharma-offering originating in the mind of enlightenment. I have heard it said that if a superior man uses a thousand words, he will make one mistake, and if an inferior man uses a thousand words, he can only achieve a single good. Here I am with *eighteen thousand words!* From all that (alas!), will even one good come?

I feel ashamed of myself—I am eighty-one years old, with a mind that has forgotten every word it ever knew. There are two young monks here attending me. Before I put my brush to the paper, I ask them how to write each character. So if there is anything wrong with the way they are written, the finger of dis-

⁸³ It appears the first two paragraphs of this epilogue were written at the time the first volume or chapter was completed; and that the remaining paragraphs were written later.

⁸⁴ The twelfth month is called *Shiwasu*, "Teacher Runs," because then even the normally staid teachers must hurry in order to take care of their unfinished business before the year ends.

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grace must be pointed at them. This old monk accepts not one iota of the blame himself!

I only regret, in this inferior, latter day when the Dharma is fast disappearing, that a man of true understanding is so rare. You could comb the world without discovering a single one. All you would come up with are blockheads, men who can't tell the difference between a stone and a precious jewel. I know what people like that will say when they set eyes on this: "Phuh! It's not even worth picking up."

I have constantly held up the uglinesses of my house for others to see. Not a single word of it could possibly do anyone a bit of good. I could smear the manuscript with soft rice and leave it out under the trees for a thousand days. Not even a crow would look twice at it. He would dismiss it outright. Call it filthy verbal refuse. Then he would break it up with his beak and scatter the pages all over the ground, give them a contemptuous spit, and fly off.

Still, I'm not resentful because people take no interest in it. If there is even a single superior seeker who has broken through the barrier, and he chances to get a glance at these lines, he will feel as though he is meeting an old friend in a far-off land. I humbly and respectfully pass this work along to that patrician of the secret depths. May you penetrate the endless thickets of the thorn-and-briar forest!

I finished writing out this fair copy of the first volume on the fifteenth day of the first month, in the third year of Meiwa (1766).