

THE HEKIGAN ROKU

(“Blue Cliff Records”)

A Translation of “Case Two”

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Case Two

[*Jōshū on the Perfect Way*]¹

[Engo’s preliminary remark:]

The whole universe may shrink; and the sun, the moon and all the stars may darken at once. Added to this, the stick may fall [upon us] like rain and the *katz* roar like thunder—[yet] all these [demonstrations] utterly fail to hit the mark that constitutes the most essential point in the teaching of our masters. All that the Buddhas of the past, present, and future can point out is to tell us, “Know thy Self!” With all their attainments, no patriarchs or masters in the annals of Zen have handled [It] in its wholeness. In spite of their extraordinary eloquence, no Buddhist writings have ever pronounced a word of comment [on It]. However penetrating their insight, no men of Zen have come out safely [when they try to determine It in any way].

This being the case, how shall we proceed in this matter? To say [It is] “Buddha,” one stirs up the muddy water [of verbalism]. To say [It is] “Zen,” makes one’s face red with shame.

It is not necessary to warn students of long standing about this; it is the beginners who must exert themselves in all earnestness about it.

¹ Jōshū Jūshin 趙州從諗 (778–897), a disciple of Nansen Fugan 南泉普願, was one of the greatest Zen masters of T’ang China. There are three more “cases” in the *Hekigan Roku* by Jōshū on the Perfect Way: Numbers 57, 58, and 59.

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[Example Two] Consider this¹:

Jōshū used to quote

This old man, what is he going to do? I hope he is not
going to involve us in further complications.

“The Perfect Way knows no difficulties;

Neither difficult nor easy.

Only is it averse to discrimination.”

What is in front of you?
The third patriarch is still alive!

As soon as there is the least verbalism, there is discrimination,
there is plain blankness.

The two-headed and three-faced one.
A petty tradesman that you are!
When fish pass, the water gets murky; when birds fly,
feathers drop.

I am not in plain blankness.

We catch glimpse of a thievish personality.
Where is this old man gone?

[How about you?] Do you cling to this² as something dearly
treasurable? or not?

The mischief is already exposed!
Yes, there are a few [still clinging].

At the time, there was a monk who asked, “If you are not in
plain blankness, what do you treasure as dearly precious?

Yes, he deserves the thrust.
The tongue sticks to the upper palate.³

Jōshū said, “I, too, do not know.”

This old man is cornered.

¹ Engo's remarks follow in smaller print.

² That is, “plain blankness” or “absolute emptiness.”

³ No utterance is possible.

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A three thousand miles' retreat!

The monk protested, "If you do not know, what makes you speak of not being in plain blankness?"

Watch where he is running to.

Thus cornered, he may have to climb up a tree.

Jōshū said, "When you have finished asking, then bow and retire."

A fine move [for Jōshū] to make!

This old rascal!

[Engo's comments:]

Jōshū used to take up this story [as a subject for his sermon]. It is taken from the Third Patriarch's "Inscription of the Mind to Believe:"

"The Perfect Way knows no difficulties;
Only it is averse to discrimination.
Let there be no love, no hate;
And it is all vacant—a plain blankness!"

Those, however, who [superficially] understand these lines as they stand would surely commit an error. [Words are like] nails and vises [that] fasten, [like] glues and gums [that] stick—they are of no use whatever. Jōshū says: "There is discrimination, there is plain blankness." In these days, as for students of Zen and seekers of truth—they are either in the midst of discriminations, or sitting right in plain blankness.

[Jōshū continues:] "I am not in plain blankness. [But how about you?] Do you cling to this as something dearly treasurable, or not?" If you are no longer therein, tell me where Jōshū himself is to be considered residing! And why has he to ask his monks whether they are treasuring it or not?

Goso, my late teacher, used to say, "Jōshū is going out of his way here to help you, and how do you understand him?" In the meantime, can you tell me where it is that Jōshū is trying to help

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you by going out of his way? See where the meaning of the fishing hook is! do not be distracted by the marks on the scale!

The monk who came forth to question Jōshū is a fine one indeed. He took advantage of the point Jōshū left untouched and asked, "If you are not in plain blankness, what do you treasure as dearly precious?"

Jōshū does not wield the stick, nor does he utter the *katzu*! He simply says, "I do not know." If this old man were somebody else, it is likely that when thus pursued, he would be at a loss as to what to do. Jōshū, being what he was, knew well, unlike an ordinary master, how to turn himself about. So ran his repartee, "I, too, do not know." The monks these days, when thus asked, may also know to retort, "I do not know, I cannot understand"; but their "know not" is not the same as Jōshū's "know not." They are on the same road, but not along the same track.

The questioning monk, however, was extraordinary and knew how to reply, saying, "If you do not know, what makes you speak of not being in plain blankness?" A fine challenge! A lesser person than Jōshū would have often found it difficult to return the challenge. But Jōshū was a great master. He simply said, "When you have finished asking, then bow and retire!"

As before, with this old man, this monk had no alternative but to hold his breath and remain silent.

This, indeed, is the way of a great master who refuses to discuss the subject intellectually, analytically, or argumentatively; for it is beyond the domain of relative thinking, and can only be approached from the absolute point of view.

Therefore it is said [as regards this subject] that you may speak abusively at the old master and spit at him like water pouring. As for the old master, he neither appeals to the stick nor to [shouting] a *katzu*!; he only uses ordinary words in his dealings with people. Yet, the whole world is unable to touch him, for he remains always himself without appealing to self-asserting discursive argumentation. Thus, he has acquired great facilities in his encounters with others—sometimes affirming, sometimes negating, freely suiting himself to

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all situations. But people do not understand him. They blame him for not answering their questions, for not explaining to them. In all this, they do not realize that they are utterly in the wrong.

[Secchō's comment in verse¹:]

The Perfect Way knows no difficulties;

A triple kōan.
The mouth filled with frost.²
What do you say?

And every word hits the point, every sentence hits the point.

When fish pass, the water becomes murky.
At sixes and sevens.
Smeared!

The one is the many,

Better divide still further.
The one in itself will not do.

The two is no duality.

How about 4, 5, 6, 7?
Why make more complications?

In the sky, the sun rises, the moon sets;

Confronting us!
Over our heads, under our feet, prevailing all around us.
Watch out! look high, look low!

Before the railings, the mountain stands high, the water
[flowing below] is cold.

Once dead, no resurrection.
One feels the chill making the hair stand on end!

The skull has no more consciousness, and how could emotions
be stirred?

¹ Engo's comments are in smaller print.

² No comment to make.

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[Lying] in the coffin, eyes wide open.
A fellow companion to Ro the Lay-brother¹.

In the dry forest the dragon bellows; the trees are not dead yet.

Tut!
The dead trees in bloom again.
Bodhidharma is touring the Eastern country.

How difficult! how difficult!

No help for heterodoxy.
Contradicting the first statement.
Where do you think you are?
This is no time to be talking
about “how easy” or “how hard.”

Discrimination or plain blankness—it is to see for yourself.

Blind!
I thought you meant we could look to others for help.
Fortunately, each of us can see for himself.
It's no concern of mine.

[Engo's comments on Secchō's verse:]

Secchō knows well where lies the ultimate meaning of this koan. Therefore he has, “The Perfect Way knows no difficulties;” which is followed by, “And every word hits the point, every sentence hits the point.” When one corner is lifted, the remaining three come along with it. Secchō proceeds, “The one is the many;/The two is no duality.” This is like making the three corners join the one.

This being so, now tell me: Where does all this lead us—“Every word hits the point, every sentence hits the point”?

Further, how is it that the many is the one, and the two is no duality? Those who have not yet opened the eye may not know where to search for the ultimate meaning of these statements.

When these two lines are understood, then consider what the ancient master² says: “When the absolute state of oneness is realized,

¹ That is, Enō the Sixth Patriarch.

² According to one commentator, this is said to be Ummon Bunyen 雲門文偃 (d. 949).

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you find as before that mountain is mountain, river is river, what is long is long, what is short is short, heaven is heaven, earth is earth." [And yet,] sometimes heaven is called earth, earth is called heaven; and, again, mountain is not mountain, and river is not river.

Ultimately, where do we find a peaceful solution [of these contradictory statements]? When the wind starts, the trees stir; when waves rise, the boats are tossed high. Spring is for sprouting, summer for maturing; autumn is for gathering, and winter for garnering. When the uniformity of oneness prevails, all differentiations disappear of themselves.

Thus all is appraised in these first four lines. Secchō, however, has still more to say. So he reopens the bundle and begins anew. He puts on another head over the one he already has, and says:

"The Perfect Way knows no difficulties;
And every word hits the point, every sentence
hits the point.
The one is the many;
And the two is no duality."

After all there was not much to say: "In the sky, the sun rises, the moon sets; / Before the railings, the mountain stands high and the water [flowing below] is cold."

When we notice how these things are so, whatever words are used, whatever we say, whatever propositions we make, they all point to the Ultimate; whichever direction we turn, the Way is there. Whatever objects we encounter, they are all true [in their suchness]. This state of mind does not come until the subject-object [way of thinking] is forgotten and everything presents itself in the aspect of identity.

Secchō at the beginning was altogether too steep [to scale], but toward the end he is indulgent enough. If a man steadily pursues the study of Zen and sees thoroughly into the nature of existence, he will find [the experience] likened to the taste of the finest cream. So long as your liking for relative thinking is not entirely given up, you will be [hopelessly] involved in confusion. You will never be able to

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understand the talk thus far advanced.

“The skull has no more consciousness, and how could emotions be stirred?/In the dry forest the dragon bellows; the trees are not dead yet.” This addition [on Secchō’s part] is a reference to an old kōan exchanged between masters and monks¹ which he utilizes here to illustrate the meaning of the lines:

The Perfect Way knows no difficulties;
Only is it averse to discrimination.

The kōan and the Perfect Way are merged and pierced through by a single spike. People these days fail to understand the meaning underlying these words as employed by the ancient masters. People use words and phrases without knowing an end. Those whose view covers a wider field of insight know well where these stories are leading us.

As you know, Kyōgen was once asked by a monk, “What is the Way (*tao*)?” Kyōgen answered, “In the dry forest the dragon bellows.” The monk asked, “Who is a man of the Way?” The master answered, “The eyes are glittering in the skull.”

Later the monk asked Sekisō, “What is meant by ‘In the dry forest the dragon bellows’?” Sekisō said, “There are emotions stirring here yet.” “What is meant by ‘The eyes are glittering in the skull’?” “There is still a remnant of consciousness left.”

Again the monk asked Sōzan, “What is the meaning of the dragon bellowing in the dry forest?” Sōzan said, “The blood has not stopped flowing yet.” “What is the meaning of the eyes glittering in the skull?” Sōzan said, “Not yet altogether dried up.” The monk further asked, “Who is able to hear it?” Sōzan said, “There is not a soul in the world who does not hear it.” The monk asked, “I wonder where I may find this statement about the dragon bellowing?” Sōzan: “I do not know where the statement appears, but those who hear are lost [i. e., they die to be reborn].

[Sōzan] has a verse on this:

In the dry forest, the dragon bellows; here is the true

¹ The current edition of the *Hekigan Roku* contains some ninety-four Chinese characters which are in effect repetitions of those given in “Example Two.” This insertion is not needed, and is no doubt an error committed by an early scribe.

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insight into the Way.
The skull is without consciousness; here we have
the first clear insight.
As the emotions die away, all tidings cease,
And there is no discrimination between the pure and
the murky. [All contradictions are identified.]

Secchō, it can be said, was a great master. At once he added all these thoughts to his *gāthā*. Though thus intermingled, they don't deviate [from the main line of thought as pursued by Jōshū].

Secchō has still more to add for the benefit of us all. He says, "How difficult! how difficult!" It is just this difficulty, however, that is to be solved. Why? Says Hyakuō, "All words, all talk, mountains, rivers and the great earth—all is ultimately reducible to the Self." Secchō's plucking and gathering [negating and affirming]—they are all also finally reducible to the Self.¹

Tell me, then, how Secchō is trying to benefit us [in the understanding of the Perfect Way]?

"Discrimination or plain blankness—it is to see
for yourself."

Complications concerning the verse being finished, why does he go on by saying, "See for yourself"? A fine pattern for you to see. What is the meaning of all this after all? Don't tell me you don't understand. I myself find it beyond understanding at this point. [After all, Bodhidharma's "I do not know" is once again thrust before us!]

¹ To die and to rise—this is the secret of all religious experience. Dying unto the self and rising to the Self. This is what Shidō Bunan Zenji 至道無難 (1603–76) declares: "While alive, be dead; thoroughly dead, do as you will, and all is right." "The Perfect Way knows no difficulties!" "When you have finished asking, bow and retire." Joshū's advice to his inquisitive monk is perfectly plain, simple and natural.