

ZEN BUDDHISM ON IMMORTALITY

Extract from *The Hekiganshu* translated with Preface by

DAISETZ T. SUZUKI

I

THE *Hekigan-shu* (碧巖集, *Pi Yen Chi*) or *Hekigan-roku* (碧巖錄, *Pi Yen Lu*)* is one of the most valued books in the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism. It consists of Seccho's (Hsüeh-tou, 雪竇) poetical comments on one hundred "cases"*** mostly selected from a history of Zen masters, called *The Transmission of the Lamp* (傳燈錄), and of Yengo's (Yüan-Wu, 圓悟) additional notes. Seccho was a great master of the Ummon school (雲門宗) and flourished early in the Sung dynasty (980-1052). He was noted for his literary ability, and when his poetical comments on the one hundred cases were made public, they at once created universal applause in the literary circles of the time. While Yengo (1063-1135) was residing in the capital of Shu (蜀), he took up, in response to the request of his pupils, Seccho's work as the text-book for his discourses on Zen. When he later came to Reisen-in (靈泉院) at Kassan (夾山), in Reishu (澧州), during the Seiwa period (政和, 1111-1118), he was again asked to discourse on the work. The notes taken down by his disciples came to be compiled into a regular book. Each case was preceded by an introductory remark, and the case itself was annotated and criticised in a way peculiar to Zen, and finally Seccho's poems were treated in a similar manner. As Yengo was indifferent about collating and revising

* *Hekigan* means "Green Rock," *shu* is "collection," and *roku* "record." The Green Rock was the name given to Yengo's study.

*** "Case" may not be a very good term for 則 (*tsê*), by which each example in the *Hekigan* is usually known. *Tsê* means "standard," or "an item" or "a clause" included in enumeration.

these notes taken by his various disciples, the notes began to circulate in an unfinished and confused form among his followers. Fearing that some day the text might get irretrievably muddled, Kuan-Yu Mu-To (關友無黨), one of Yengo's pupils, decided to have an authorised *editio princeps* of it and thus to put a stop to all possible variations that might follow from promiscuous copyings. The book came out in print late in the spring of 1125, which was twenty years after a third lecture had been given by the master on the text. Neither the editor, Kuan-Yu Wu-To, nor the preface-writer, P'u-chao (普照), however, makes any reference to the text having been gone through with by the author personally before it was published in printed form.

Later, Daiye (Tai-hui, 大慧), the most brilliant and most gifted disciple of Yengo, burned the *Hekiganshu*, seeing that it was not doing any good to the truthful understanding of Zen. While it is not quite clear what he actually did, the book apparently stopped to circulate. It was not until about two hundred years later (1302) that Cho Meiyen (張明遠), of Yüchung (嶠中), found a good copy of the *Hekigan* at Ch'êng-tu (成都), in Shu. He collated this with other copies obtained in the South, and the result was the current copy we have now.

Dōgen (道元), the founder of the Sōto school of Zen in Japan, it is reported, was the first who brought the *Hekigan* from China in the third year of Karoku (1227) about eighty years prior to the Chang edition. It is not definitely known when the latter was imported to Japan, but as there was much intercourse between the Japanese and the Chinese Zen masters in those days, the book must have come to this shore through some of the Japanese monks who went to China to study Buddhism. Early in the fifteenth century we have already a Japanese edition of the *Hekigan*.

The constitution of the book is generally in the following order: Each case is preceded by Yengo's introductory note (1); the case itself is interpolated with critical passages (2);

then comes an expository comment on the case (3); which is followed by Secchos's poetical criticism which is also interposed with Yengo's remarks (4); and finally we have explanatory notes to the poem (5).

The following is an English translation of the Case LV faithfully rendered to the extent admissible by the construction of the original which in itself will be almost altogether unintelligible to those who are not acquainted with Zen literature. This will be realised by the reader even when perusing my translation which is far from being literal.

II

THE CASE LV—DŌGO VISITS A FAMILY TO MOURN THE DEAD

1. *Introductory Note*

[The perfect master of Zen] quietly within himself asserts the whole truth and testifies it at every turn; wading through the cross-currents he controls the circumstances, and directly sees into the identity of things. As in the sparks struck from flint or as in the flash of lightning, [so instantaneously] he makes away with intricacies and complications; while taking hold of the tiger's head he lets not the tail slip out of his hands; he is like unto a rugged precipice one thousand feet high. But we will not speak of such [achievements as these on the part of the master]; let us see if there is not an approachable way in which he manifests the truth for the sake of others. Here is a case for our consideration.

2. *The Illustrative Case*

Dōgo (Tao-wu, 道吾)* and Zengen (Chien-yüan, 漸源) visited a family to mourn the dead. Zengen knocked at the

* Dōgo (Tao-wu) whose personal name was Yenchi (Yüan-chih, 圓智) was a disciple of Yakusan (Yüeh-shan, 藥山), and died in 835, of the T'ang era, at the age of sixty-seven. When he was once in attendance with his brother-

coffin and said, "Living, or dead?"—What do you say?—Well, you are not at all alive.—This fellow still wanders between two paths.—Said Dōgo, "Living? I affirm not: Dead? I affirm not."—When a dragon sings fog is formed: when a tiger roars the wind rises.—The hat fits the head.—A grandmotherly kindness!—"Why no affirmation, sir?" asked Zengen.—Gone wrong!—Sure enough, a blunder!—"None whatever I make," Dōgo replied.—Filthy water is poured right over your head!—The first arrow was rather light, but the second goes deeper.—On their way home,—Quite lively!—Zengen said, "O my master, be pleased to tell me about it; if you do not, I will strike you down."—This is something.—We rarely meet wise men, most of them are fools.—One so full of irrationalities ought to fall into Hell faster than an arrow.—Dōgo said, "As to your striking it is your own pleasure: as to telling I have nothing to tell."—Repetition is necessary for serious affairs.—He is not aware even of being robbed.—This old man's tenderness knows no bounds.—The first idea is still asserted.

monk Ungan (Yün-yen, 雲巖) on their master Yüeh-shan, the latter said to Yüan-chih, "Where the intellect fails to fathom, beware of giving utterance to it; if you utter a word, horns will grow on your forehead. What would you say to this?" Yüan-chih, without making any reply, went out of the room. Yün-yen now asked the master, "How is it that my senior brother-monk does not give you any answer?" Said the master, Yüeh-shan, "My back aches today; you better go to Yüan-chih himself as he understands." Yün-yen now came to his brother-monk, Yüan-chih, and said, "Why did you not answer our master awhile ago? Please tell me the reason, O Brother." "You'd better ask our master himself,"—this was Yüan-chih's enigmatic suggestion.

Sekisō (Shih-shuang, 石霜) was a disciple of Dōgo Yenchi (Tao-wu Yüan-chih). He once asked the master, "If someone after your passing happens to ask me about the ultimate thing, what shall I say to him?" The master, Yüan-chih, did not answer the question, but simply called to his attendant-boy who at once came forward in response. Said the master, "You fill the pitcher with fresh water." After remaining silent for a little while, the master now turned towards Shih-shuang and asked, "What did you want to know awhile ago?" Shih-shuang repeated his first question, whereupon the master rose from his seat and left the room. This leaving the room was evidently a favourite way with Tao-wu Yüan-chih when he wished to demonstrate the truth of Zen.

His other sayings and doings are recorded in *The Transmission of the Lamp*.

—Zengen struck the master.—Well done!—Tell me what is the use of striking him thus.—Sometimes one has to suffer an unreasonable treatment.—Later when Dōgo died, Zengen went to Sekiso (Shih-shuang, 石霜) and told him about the aforementioned incident.—Knowingly trespassed!—I wonder if this were right, or not.—If right, how marvelous!—Sekiso said, “Living? I affirm not: dead? I affirm not!”—How very refreshing!—Even an everyday meal is relished by some!—Zengen asked again, “Why no affirmation, sir?”—The same wording and no difference in sense either.—Tell me if this is the same question as the first.—“None whatever I make!” said Sekiso.—Heaven above, earth below!—When the waves are surging like this at Tsachi, how many common mortals are drowned on land!—This instantly awakened Zengen to an understanding.—O this purblind fellow!—I am not to be deceived!

One day Zengen came out into the Preaching Hall with a spade, and walked up and down from east to west, from west to east.—The dead resuscitated!—Good! This showing himself off in behalf of the late master!—Don't ask of others.—Behold how this fellow is disgracing himself!—“What are you doing?” asked Sekiso.—Blindly treading in the steps of another!—Replied Zengen, “I am seeking the sacred bones of the late master.”—Too late, like hanging a medicine bag behind the hearse carriage.—Too bad that he missed the first step.—What do you say?—“The huge waves are rolling far and near, the foaming seas are flooding the sky, and what sacred bones of the late master's should you seek here?” Said Sekiso.—As to this, let another master see to it.—What is the use of following the masses?—Seccho remarked here, “What a pity! What a pity!”—Too late.—This is like stretching the bow after the burglar.—Better have him buried in the same grave.—Said Zengen, “This is the very moment to be thankful for.”—Say, now, where does all this finally come to?—What did the late master tell you before?—This fellow has never known from beginning till end how to free himself.—Monk Fu, of Taigen (太原孚), remarked here, “The holy bones of the late master are still here.”—O my disciples, see them?—It is like the stroke of lightning.—What sort of worn-out sandals these!—This is after all worth something.

3. *Commentary Remarks*

Dōgo and Zengen went out one day to see a family in order to mourn the dead. Zengen knocking at the coffin said, "Living? or dead?" And Dogo said, "Living? I affirm not: dead? I affirm not!" If you gain an insight right here at this remark, you will know then where you are bound for. Just here and nowhere else is the key that will release you from the bondage of birth and death. If you have not yet gained it, you are liable to slip away at every turn. See how earnest those ancient students of Zen were! Whether walking or standing, sitting or lying, their constant thoughts were fixed upon this matter. As soon as they came into a house of mourning, Zengen knocking at the coffin lost no time in asking Dōgo, "Living? or dead?" Dōgo instantly responded, "Living? I affirm not: dead? I affirm not!" Zengen straightway slipped over the literary meaning of his master's remark. Hence his second question: "Why no affirmation?" To this Dōgo answered, "None whatever I make!" How full of kindness was his heart!—One error succeeds another.

Zengen had not yet come to himself. When they were halfway on their homeward walk, he again accosted his master, saying, "O master, do please tell me about it. If you don't I will strike you." This fellow knows not a thing. It is the case of a kindness not being requited. But Dōgo who was ever grandmotherly and full of tenderness, responded, "As to striking, it is your own pleasure: as to telling, I have nothing to tell."

Thereupon Zengen struck. While this was so unfortunate, he may be regarded as having gained one point over the master. From the very bottom of his heart, Dōgo did everything to enlighten his disciple, and yet the disciple significantly failed to grasp the meaning at the moment. Being thus struck by his disciple, Dōgo said, "It will be better for you to leave our monastery for a while. If our head-monk

learns somehow of this incident, you may get into trouble."

Zengen was then quietly sent away. How full of tenderness Dōgo was! Zengen later came into a small temple where he happened to listen to one of the lay-brothers there reciting *The Kwannon Sutra* in which it read: "To those who are to be saved by him assuming the form of a bhikkhu (monk), Kwannon will preach to them in the form of a bhikkhu." When Zengen heard these words, he at once came to a realization and said to himself: "I was at fault indeed; I did not know what to make of my late master at the time. This matter is not after all dependent upon mere words."

An ancient master remarked, "Even the extraordinarily wise stumble over words." Some try to make an intellectual guess at Dōgo's attitude, saying that when he flatly refused to say a word about the matter, he had really something already said, and that such an attitude on the part of the master was known as playing a backward somersault in order to lead people astray and to make them feel all confused. If this were to be so interpreted, I would say, how could we ever come to enjoy peace of mind? Only when our feet are treading the solid ground of reality, we know that the truth is not a hair's breadth away from ourselves.

Observe, when those seven wise ladies of India visited the Forest of Death, one of them asked pointing at a corpse, "The dead body is here, but where is the person?" Said the eldest, "What? What?" Thereupon, the entire company is said to have had the *anupattikadharmakshānti*, realisation of the truth uncreated. How many of such do we come across these days? Perhaps, only one in a thousand or ten thousand.

Zengen later went to Sekiso and asked him to be enlightened on the matter above referred to. But Sekiso also repeated Dōgo and said, "Living? I affirm not! Dead? I affirm not!" When Zengen demanded, "Why don't you make any affirmation?" Replied Sekiso, "None whatever I make!" This opened up Zengen's mind.

One day Zengen carried a spade out into the Preaching Hall where he walked up and down with it. The idea was to present his view to the master, who as he expected did not fail to inquire and say, "What are you doing?" Zengen said, "I am seeking for the sacred bones of my late master." Sekiso trying to cut Zengen's feet right off from the ground, remarked, "The huge waves are rolling far and near, the white foaming seas are flooding even to the sky: and what sacred bones of your late master's are you seeking here?" Zengen had already expressed his intention to seek his late master's bones, and what did Sekiso mean when he made this remark? If you understand what is implied in the words, "Living? I affirm not! Dead? I affirm not!" you would know that Sekiso is behaving himself from beginning to end with his whole heart and soul opened to your full observation. But as soon as you begin to reason about it and hesitate and ponder, the thing will never come to view. Zengen's reply, "That is the very moment to be thankful for," shows how different his attitude is, when compared with his former one while still uninitiated. Dōgo's skull is shining in golden colour, and when it is struck, it gives a resonant sound like that of copper ware. Seccho's remark, "What a pity! What a pity!" has a double signification, while Taigen's statement "The sacred bones of the late master are still here!" naturally hits the mark and is well said.

To put the whole matter in one bundle and thrust it before your eyes, tell me now where lies the most essential point of this episode? And where is the point at which you have to be thankful for? Don't you know the saying: "If one point is broken through, a thousand and even ten thousand other points will be at once broken through"? If you successfully pass through at the point where Dōgo says, "No affirmation whatever I make!" you will be able to shut out every tongue that wags in the whole world. If you are unable to pass through, retire into your own room and exert yourself to

the utmost to get into the truth of Zen. Don't idle away your precious time by doing nothing all day.

4. *Seccho's Criticism in Verse*

Hares and horses have horns.

—Cut them off.—How remarkable!—How refreshing!

Cows and sheep have no horns.

—Cut them off.—What a fuss!—Others may be cheated, but not I.

Not a speck of dust, not a particle!

—Heaven above, earth below, I alone am the honoured one!—Where do you intend to grope?

Like the mountains, like the peaks!

—Where are they?—This is stirring up waves on dry land.—It is rubbed in hard against your nose.

The sacred bones in golden yellow are still here;

—The tongue is cut off and throat choked.—Put it aside.—I'm afraid nobody knows him.

The white foaming waves are flooding the sky, and where can we seize upon them?

—A hold is released a little.—Slipped right over it.—Eyes and ears are filled with it.

Nowhere to seize upon them!

—Just as I told you!—This is something after all.—Surely tumbled into an abyss!

With a single shoe [Bodhidharma] got off west, and where is his trace now?

—When fathers leave things unfinished, their descendants suffer the consequence.—Striking a blow, one should say, "Why is it here now?"

5. *Commentary Remarks*

This is Seccho's critical verse showing how thoroughly he understood the case. As he is a descendant of the Ummon school (雲門宗), he knows how to put a triple hammering point into the body of one sentence. His verse seizes the

most vital portion by giving an affirmation where no affirmation is possible and by opening a passage where no opening is practicable. So he declares.

“Hares and horses have horns;
Cows and sheep have no horns.”

Let me ask how it is that hares and horses have horns whereas cows and sheep have none. When you understand the aforementioned case, you will then see into the meaning of Seccho's statement in which he has a scheme for the benefit of others. There are some who entertain a mistaken view as regards this and say, “Whether a master affirms or denies, just the same he is affirming something. Negation is after all no more than affirmation. As hares and horses have no horns, he says that they have horns; and as cows and sheep have horns, he says that they have no horns.” Such an understanding of the subject-matter has no bearings whatever on it. On the contrary, the ancient master is full of arts and therefore knows how to perform such miracles; and they are all for your benefit so that you are enabled to break up the dark cave of haunting spirits. When you pass through this, it is not after all worth much of anything.

“Hares and horses have horns;
Cows and sheep have no horns.
Not a speck of dust, not a particle!
Like the mountains, like the peaks!”

These four lines are like a cintamani-jewel which Seccho throws out all in perfect form to your face. The rest of the verse decides the case according to the affidavit.

“The sacred bones in golden yellow are still here;
The white foaming waves are flooding the sky, and where can we
seize upon them?”

This is concerned with the remarks by Sekiso and Taigen Fu. But why the following lines?

“Nowhere to seize upon them!
With a single shoe [Bodhidharma] got off west, and where is his
trace now?”

This is like a holy tortoise leaving its track. And here is where Seccho takes a turn in order to do others good. Says an old master, "Apply yourself to a living word and not to a dead one." If its trace got already lost, why is all the world vying with one another to get hold of it?