

GENSHA¹ ON THREE INVALIDS

Preliminary Remark

When gates and courts are established, then there are twos, there are threes, there is a realm of multiplicities; when a deep discourse is carried on the highest subjects of intuition a world of sevens and eights is thoroughly broken through. According to the ways in which views are presented, they are crushed to pieces so that the barricades even when they are of golden chains are successfully brushed aside. When orders are given from the highest quarters, all traces are wiped off, leaving nothing whereby trailing is made possible. When do we come across such a *koan*? Let one who has an eye on the forehead see to it.

The Illustrative Case

Gensha gave the following sermon:

“It is asserted by all the worthy masters of the present time that they are working for the benefit of all beings. [—Each keeps a shop according to his means.—Some are rich and others are poor.]

“This being the case, what will you do if here suddenly appear before you three kinds of invalids? [—By beating up the weeds, we mean to frighten snakes out.—As for me, it makes my eyes open wide and my mouth close.—We all have to beat a retreat even for three thousand *li*.]

“Those who are blind fail to see you even when you hold up a mallet or a *hossu*. [—Blind to the very core.—This is no other than “benefitting all beings”—Not necessarily failing to see.]

“Those who are deaf fail to hear you even when you may talk volubly enough. [—Deaf to the very core!—This is no other than “benefitting all beings”—Not necessarily altogether deaf.—That something is still unheard.]

“Those who are dumb fail to speak out whatever under-

¹ 玄沙 (Hsüan-sha), 835–908.

standing they may have inwardly. [---Dumb to the very core!—This is no other than “benefitting all beings.”—Not necessarily altogether dumb.—That something is still left untold of.]

“What treatment are you going to accord to such people? If you do not know how to go on with them, Buddhism must be said to be lacking in miraculous works.” [—Quite true, this word—I am ready to give myself up with my hands folded.—“Benefitting” already accomplished!—“He then struck.”]

A monk asked Ummon (Yün-mên) to be enlightened. [—It is also important to go about and inquire.—Hit!]

Said Ummon, “You make bows.” [—As the wind blows, the grass bends.—Ch’ua!]

When the monk rose from making bows, [—This monk’s staff is broken!]

Ummon poked him with a staff, and the monk drew back. Said Ummon, “You are not blind then?” [—Blind to the very core!—Do not say that this monk has a failing eye-sight.]

Ummon now told him to approach, and the monk approached. [—Washed with a second dipperful of dirty water.—Kwan-non is come!—To give a “*Kwatz!*” was better.]

Said Ummon, “You are not deaf then?” [—Deaf to the very core!—Do not say that this monk is deaf in his ears.]

Ummon further continued, “Do you understand?” [—Why does he not feed him with the right forage?—Pity that he then at all uttered a word.]

“No, master, I do not,” was the reply. [—A double *koan!*—What a pity!]

Ummon said, “You are not dumb then?” [—Dumb to the very core!—What eloquence!—Do not say that this monk is dumb.]

The monk now grasped the point. [—Stretching the bow when the burglar is off.—What old bowl is he after?]

Commentary Notes

Gensha gives this sermon from his standpoint where he is now able to sit, after years of his study of Zen, in absolute nakedness with no trumpery trimmings about him, altogether shorn of imaginations and free from conceptualism. In those days there were many Zen monasteries each of which rivalled the others. Gensha used to give this sermon to his monks:

“It is asserted by all the worthy masters of the present time that they are working for the benefit of all beings. This being the case, what will you do if here suddenly appear before you three kinds of invalids? Those who are blind fail to see you even when you hold up a mallet or a *hossu*. Those who are deaf fail to hear you even when you may talk volubly enough. Those who are dumb fail to speak out whatever understanding they may have inwardly. What treatment are you going to accord to such people? If you do not know how to go on with them, Buddhism must be said to be lacking in miraculous works.”

If people understand him here as merely making reference to the blind, to the deaf, to the dumb, they are vainly groping in the dark. Therefore, it is said that you are not to search for the meaning in the words which kill; you are requested to enter directly into the spirit itself of Gensha, when you will grasp the meaning.

As Gensha ordinarily tested his monks with this statement, a monk who was staying for sometime with him one day accosted him when he came up to the Dharma-hall, and asked: “Do you allow me to present my way of reasoning about your sermon on the three invalids?” Gensha said, “Yes, you may go on.” Whereupon the monk remarked, “Fare thee well, O master!” and left the room. Gensha said, “Not that, not that.” We can see that this monk has fully grasped Gensha.

Later on, Hōgen (Fa-yen, died 958) made this state-

ment: "When I listened to Master Jizo (Ti-tsang) making reference to this monk's remark, I was enabled to understand Gensha's sermon on the three invalids."

I ask you now. "[Here is a puzzle for you, O monks!] If that monk did not understand Gensha, how was it that Hōgen made this statement of his? If that monk understood Gensha, why did the latter declare, 'Not that, not that?'"

One day Jizō said to Gensha, "I am told that you have given a sermon on the three invalids, is that so?" Gensha answered, "Yes." Jizō then said, "I have my eyes, ears, nose, and tongue; what treatment would you give me?" Gensha was quite satisfied with this request on the part of Jizō.

When Gensha is understood, you will realise that his spirit is not to be sought in words. You will also see that those who understand make themselves naturally distinguishable from the rest.

Later when a monk came to Ummon (Yün-men, died 949) and asked him about Gensha's sermon, Ummon was ready to demonstrate it in the following way as he thoroughly understood Gensha. Said Ummon to the monk, "You make bows." When the monk rose from making bows, Ummon poked him with a staff, and the monk drew back. Said Ummon, "You are not blind then?" Ummon now told him to approach, and the monk approached. Said Ummon "You are not deaf then?" Finally, he said, "Do you understand?" "No, master," being the reply, Ummon remarked, "You are not dumb then?" This made the monk grasp the point.

If this monk of Ummon's had any sort of understanding about Gensha, he would have kicked up the master's chair when he was told to make bows, and no more fussing would have been necessary. In the meantime let me ask you whether Ummon and Gensha both understood the problem in the same way, or not. I tell you that their understanding is

directed to one point. That the ancient masters come out among us and make all kinds of contrivance is because they wish to see somebody bite their hook and be caught up. They thus make bitter remarks in order to have us see into the great event of this life.

My own master Goso (Wu-tsu, died 1104) had this to say: "Here is one who can talk well but has no understanding; here is another who understands but is unable to talk about it. When these two present themselves before you, how will you distinguish the one from the other? If you cannot make this discrimination, you cannot expect to free people from their bondage and attachment. But when you can, I will see to it that, as soon as you enter my gate, I put on a pair of sandals and run through the inside of your body for several times even before you realise. In case, however, you fail to have an insight in this matter, what is the use of hunting around for an old bowl? Better be gone!"

Do you wish to know what is the ultimate meaning of these complications in regard to the blind, deaf, and dumb? Let us see what Seccho says about it.

Seccho's Remark in Verse

Blind, deaf, dumb! [—Even before any word is uttered.—
The three sense-organs are perfectly sound.—Already
finished is one paragraph!]
Infinitely beyond the reach of imaginative contrivances!
[—Where do you wish to hunt for it?—Is there any-
thing here which permits your calculations?—What
relationship have they after all?]
Above the heavens and below the heavens! [—Perfectly
free is the working of Truth!—Thou hast said!]
How ludicrous! How disheartening! [—What is it that
is so ludicrous, so disheartening?—Partly bright and
partly dark.]
Li-lou does not know how to discriminate the right colour.
[—Blind fellow!—A good craftsman leaves no trace.
—Blind to the very core!]

How can Shih-k'uang recognise the mysterious tune?
 [—Deaf in his ears!—There is no way to appreciate
 the greatest merit.—Deaf to the very core!]

What life can compare with this?—Sitting alone quietly
 by the window, [—This is the way to go on.—Do not
 try to get your livelihood in a cave of ghosts.—Break
 up all at once this cask of coal tar!]

I observe the leaves fall and the flowers bloom as the
 seasons come and go. [—What reason do you think
 it is now?—Do not regard this as doing-nothing-ness.
 —Today, morning is followed by evening; tomorrow,
 morning is followed by evening.]

Seccho now remarked: “Do you understand, or not?”
 [—“Repeated in the gatha.”]

An iron bar without a hole! [—Coming up with your own
 confession!—Too bad that he was released too easily.
 —“Then he struck.”]

Yengo's Comment on Seccho

“Blind, deaf, dumb!

Infinitely beyond the reach of imaginative contri-
 vances!”

In this, Seccho has swept everything away for you—
 what you see together with what you do not see, what you
 hear together with what you do not hear, and what you
 talk about together with what you cannot talk about. All
 these are completely brushed off, and you attain the life of
 the blind, deaf, and dumb. Here all your imaginations,
 contrivances, and calculations are once for all put an end
 to, they are no more made use of, this is where lies the
 highest point of Zen, this is where we have true blindness,
 true deafness, and true dumbness, each in its artless and
 effectless aspect.

“Above the heavens and below the heavens!

How ludicrous! how disheartening!”

Here Seccho lifts up with one hand and with the other puts
 down. Tell me what he finds to be ludicrous, what he finds
 to be disheartening. It is ludicrous that this dumb person
 is not after all dumb, that this deaf one is not after all deaf;

it is disheartening that the one who is not at all blind is blind for all that, and that the one who is not at all deaf is deaf for all that.

“Li-lou does not know how to discriminate the right colour.” When he is unable to discriminate between blue and yellow, red and white, he is certainly a blind man. He lived in the reign of the Emperor Huang. He is said to have been able to discern the point of a soft hair at a distance of one hundred steps. His eye-sight was extraordinary. When the Emperor Huang had a pleasure-trip to the River Chi‘h, he dropped his precious jewel in the water and made Li fetch it up. But he failed. The Emperor made Ch‘ih-kou search for it, but he also failed to locate it. Later Hsiang-wang was ordered to get it, and he got it. Hence:

“When Hsiang-wang goes down, the precious gem shines most brilliantly;

But where Li-lou walks about, the waves rise even to the sky.”

When we come up to these higher spheres, even the eyes of Li-lou are incapacitated to distinguish which is the right colour.

“How can Shih-kuang recognise the mysterious tune?”

Shih-kuang was son of Ching-kuang of Chin in the province of Chiang in the Chou dynasty. His other name was Tzŭ-yeh. He could thoroughly distinguish the five sounds and the six notes, he could even hear the ants fight on the other side of a hill. When Chin and Ch‘u were at war, Shih-kuang could tell, by merely quietly playing on the strings of his lute, that the engagement would surely be unfavourable for Ch‘u. In spite of his extraordinary sensitiveness, Seccho (Hsüeh-t‘ou) declares that he is unable to recognise the mysterious tune. After all, one who is not at all deaf is really deaf in his ears. The most exquisite note in the higher spheres is indeed beyond the ear of Shih-kuang. Says Seccho: “I am not going to be a Li-lou, nor to be a Shih-kuang, but

“What life can compare with this?—Sitting alone quietly
by the window,
I observe the leaves fall, the flowers bloom as the seasons
come and go.”

When one attains this stage of realisation, seeing is no-seeing, hearing is no-hearing, preaching is no-preaching. When hungry one eats, when tired one sleeps. Let the leaves fall, let the flowers bloom as they like. When the leaves fall, I know it is the autumn; when the flowers bloom, I know it is the spring. Each season has its own features.

Having swept everything clean before you, Seccho now opens a passageway, saying: “Do you understand, or not?” He has done all he could for you, he is exhausted, only able to turn about and present to you this iron-bar without a hole. It is a most significant expression. Look and see with your own eyes! If you hesitate, you miss the mark for ever.

Yengo [Yüan-wu, the author of this commentary note,] now raised his *hossu* and said, “Do you see?” He then struck his chair and said, “Do you hear?” Coming down from the chair, he said, “Was anything talked about?”

The above is a literal translation of the Case LXXXVIII of the *Pi-yen Chi* (碧巖集), which is one of the most important and at the same time the most popular Zen texts. The words in brackets in the “Illustrative Case” and in Seccho’s verse are those of Yengo. As to the nature and composition of the *Pi-yen Chi*, see my *Zen Essays*, Series II, p. 217 et seq.

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