

The Record of Going Easy

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從 容 錄

*Old Man Wānsōng Explains
Venerable Tiāntóng Jué's Ancient
Record of Going Easy*

Case 23: Lǚzǔ Sits Facing the Wall

This is one case from a one-hundred case kōan collection compiled by Hóngzhì Zhēngjué (1091-1157; referred to as Tiāntóng in this text) who also wrote a verse for each case. The introduction, commentaries, and capping phrases (J. jakugo) were written by Wānsōng Xíngxiù (1166–1246). Below, the capping phrases are indented and italicized. Both Tiāntóng and Wānsōng were masters in the Cáodòng (J. “Sōtō”) lineage, although they were not directly related. Translated with annotations by Dosho Port.

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Presenting to the assembly, saying:

Bodhidharma's nine years is called wall gazing. [Huìkě] Shénguāng's three bows leaked the mystery known only to heaven. How can you sweep away the tracks and extinguish the traces?¹

舉

Every time a monk came to meet Lǔzǔ, he would sit facing the wall.

Person to person meeting is complete!

Nánquán heard of this and said, "I usually face them and say, 'Take it up before the empty kalpa, get it before the Buddha's birth.'

This monk too doesn't get it.

Still, I can't produce one or a half.

Searching just to plug a leak.

This way he'll go on until the year of the ass."

One who rushes won't understand.

The teacher [Wānsōng] said,

Every time a monk came to Chízhōu's Zen Master Bǎoyún of Lǔzǔ Mountain, he would sit facing the wall.² Ever since Bodhidharma's nine years [of facing a wall], no one has again performed this imperative. They all ask the Buddha and Ancestors about how to get to the top and how to get to the bottom. Yet, everyone knows some pain and itch.

Nánquán and Lǔzǔ had trained together.³ When meeting people, their needles and awls were immovable, then they'd strike the place of broken concentration: "I usually face them and say, 'Take it up before the empty kalpa, get it before the Buddha's birth.' Still, I can't produce one or a half."

His intention seems to be to let out a single thread, but actually he substitutes for Lǔzǔ's attendant and offers the final imperative for transmitting the dharma.

Nánquán also said, "This way he'll go on until the year of the ass." His intention seems to be to reproach Lǔzǔ for being too solitary and severe, but actually he affirms how

¹ See the Appendix for Yasutani Roshi and Yamada Roshi's comments on the meaning of facing the wall.

² **Luzu Baoyun** (nd), a ninth-generation successor in China through Mazu.

³ **Nanquan Puyan** (748-834), a ninth-generation successor in China through Mazu.

Lǔzǔ bestows the separate teaching face-to-face. Haven't you heard the saying, "Even if you can explain it completely, how could that be as good as turning and intimately reaching it?"

That's why on Vulture Peak it was like drawing the moon. At Cáoxī it was like a finger pointing to the moon.⁴ How does Lǔzǔ inside the Crystal Palace spreading cold within the palace halls compare with an open heart, seeing together?⁵

Bǎofú saw Nánquán's and Lǔzǔ's weak points, so asked Chángqìng, "What is Lǔzǔ embellishing that Nánquán speaks in this way?"

I, Wànsōng, say, why does Bǎofú say "embellish"? If not for [having the eye to] distinguish the budless branch in spring and fall, it'd be difficult to raise this question.

Chángqìng correctly said, "Returning to the self, yielding to a person - not something that's done by one in ten thousand."⁶

I, Wànsōng, say, ancient people realized such a clear eye!

Xuánjué said, "Was Nánquán's reply humming the same tune, or did he disagree?"⁷

I, Wànsōng, say, half covered, half concealed. You can't slander him one little bit!

Cuìyán Zhī said, "Why give it so much effort?"

⁴ **Vulture Peak**, 靈山, refers to the teaching Shakyamuni Buddha. **Caoxi** is Dajian Huineng (638-713; aka, the Sixth Ancestor, aka Caoxi), a sixth-generation successor in China.

⁵ **Crystal Palace**, 水晶宮, is a reference to *The Avatamsaka Sutra*, Book 39: "The Gandavyuha" and the pilgrim Sudhana's tenth teacher: "The palace was made of radiant jewels set on a crystal base, furnished with countless jewel mirrors, spread with countless jewel nets, graced with the sounds of a hundred thousand golden bells tinkling in the breeze. Sudhana saw the girl Maitrayani. She had dark eyes, black hair, and golden skin. He paid his respects to her, told her of his mission, and asked her how to learn and carry out the practice of bodhisattvas. Maitrayani said to Sudhana: 'Look at the adornments of my palace.' Looking all around, Sudhana saw images of all the buddhas of the cosmos in all stages of their teaching activities reflected from every object in the palace, from every wall, every mirror, every figurine, every jewel, every golden bell, every girl's body. Holding in his mind this array of visions of the buddhas, Sudhana joined his hands in a gesture of respect and turned his attention to Maitrayani's words. Maitrayani told Sudhana that by studying with countless buddhas she had been shown a means of access to perfect wisdom by way of the arrangement of the totality." **seeing together**, 相見, Japanese, *shoken*, is the formal meeting between teacher and student for the purpose of conveying instructions for training.

⁶ **Changqing** Huileng (854-932), a thirteenth-generation successor in China through Xuefeng in the Deshan line.

⁷ **Xuanjue** is unknown to me.

I, Wànsōng, say, raising this is already imitating a drawing of a pattern.

Cuìyán Zhī continued, “If a monk comes, what do they see?”

I, Wànsōng, say, you resent how few there are.

Cuìyán Zhī continued, “Knowing when [facing a wall] is appropriate.”

I, Wànsōng, say, if it were Táo Yuānmíng, he would knit his eyebrows together and return home.⁸

Cuìyán Zhī continued, “I am not like this. Before entering the womb, it is impossible to understand. If you attain understanding, I’ll strike, breaking you in two at your waist.”

I, Wànsōng, say, Venerable, to whom does your staff cause suffering?

Luóshān said, “At that time, if Wáng Rōshi saw this, he’d have lit five fires on his backside for knowing how to release, but not how to gather in.”⁹

I, Wànsōng, say, getting up as the Fifth Watch (3:00am) approaches, there is someone who practices virtue in secret.

Xuánshā said, “At that time, if I’d seen it, I’d also have lit five fires on his backside.”¹⁰

I, Wànsōng, say, the disturbing spring wind has not yet subsided.

Yúnjū Xī said, “Luóshān and Xuánshā both summed it up this way.¹¹ Did they use the same or different radical reasoning?”¹²

⁸ **Tao Yuanming** (c. 365–427), CJKV: “Jin dynasty writer and poet. He was from the locale of Xunyang (in modern day Jiangxi), a descendant of Tao Kan. His given name was Qian, and thus he is also found in reference works under the name Tao Qian, with Yuanming being his pen-name. He referred to himself as ‘Teacher Five Willows,’ and was called by others Teacher Jingjie. He was once a magistrate in the prefecture of Pengze, but quit after eighty days and returned home, expressing his feelings in a document called ‘Returning to Live in the Countryside.’ While farming, he delighted in wine and nature, playing the lute in the garden with his friends, and writing poetry. His works brought a major influence on subsequent literary forms. His extant works are collected in the *Tao Yuanming ji*.”

⁹ **Luoshan** Daoxian (nd), a thirteenth-generation successor in China through Yantou in the Deshan line. **Wang Rōshi** is one of Nanquan’s sobriquets.

¹⁰ **Xuansha** Shibe (835–908), a thirteenth-generation successor in China through Xuefeng in the Deshan line.

¹¹ **Yunju Qingxi** (nd), a sixteenth-generation successor in China in the Deshan line through Fayān.

¹² **radical reasoning**, 道理, is also “Way principle.” I follow Hee Jin Kim here.

I, Wànsōng, say, to sum up, it would be ten fires on his backside.

Yúnjū Xī continued, “If you sort this out and gain liberation, I’ll allow that your buddhadharma seat has some possibility.”

I, Wànsōng, say, you should have the other five fires on your backside. You look! This way, Nánquán disparaged Lǔzǔ, yet Chángqìng still said, “Returning to the self, yielding to a person.”

Lǔzǔ cut off the barrier crossing. Yet Luóshān said Lǔzǔ knew how to release, but not how to gather in. All of this is like fish swimming in front of the net, like drawing the bow after the thief has gone. Furthermore, look at the distinctions that Tiāntóng creates:

Verse

Tasty within the tasteless

Who taught you to add salt to vinegar?

Marvelously going beyond feeling and meaning

Another day you’ll talk

Continuously seeming to exist before appearances

Already fallen into the secondary

Towering, towering - as if stupid! The noble Way

No one can make its value known

Carved jade loses its purity

The monk holds it high

A pearl in a deep pool is beautiful in itself

Stop showing off

Utterly cool, fresh air - distinct from the grinding heat of autumn

*Body exposed in the golden wind*¹³

One wisp of a leisurely cloud divides sky and water

A memorial ceremony brings many devils

The teacher [Wànsōng] said,

In former times, Túdān Èr, the emperor’s son-in-law, went to the capital to take up his assignment. Dàmíng monastery was on the road through Cízhōu, so Túdān Èr entered

¹³ **Body exposed in the golden wind**, 體露金風, see *The Blue Cliff Record*, Case 27, for this statement by Yunmen.

the main hall and was moved by the sight of a monk sitting and facing a wall. Túdān Èr said, “There’s one person here who is fond of the tasteless.”

Great Teacher Quán said, “Tasty within the tasteless.¹⁴ The essence of water is tasteless. When you use it to make tea or honey, bitterness and sweetness arise. The essence is also calm and peaceful. You can cause it to become delusion or awakening. How, then, are ordinary and holy established?”

Although Great Teacher Quán said there is taste within the tasteless, it is tasteless taste. Such taste is constant, wondrous, and surpasses discrimination and designation. Feelings and words come from this mind. Designation and words come from speech. Reach this and the path of speech is cut off. The movement of mind comes to an end.

Făyǎn said, “The utmost principle is unmoved by designations.¹⁵ How could there be anything like this?”

The *Dàodéjīng*, in the chapter about the valley spirit that does not die, says, “The mysterious mother is its gate, the root of heaven and earth. It is continuous as if it exists.”

The *Dàodéjīng* also says, “I do not know its offspring. It comes before Laozi.”

Kesa-wearing monks speak of “continuous as if it exists” as not completely cutting off. As for “It comes before Laozi,” we say “before the empty kalpa, before buddhas were born in the world.”

Tiāntóng’s verse says, “as if stupid! The noble Way” - this secretly uses Xuědòu’s “...as if stupid! The noble Way.”¹⁶ Xuědòu’s verse says,

Rain passes, clouds thicken, dawn begins to break
Like a picture, numerous peaks, towering, blue green
Subhuti did not understand how to sit at the precipice¹⁷
And attracted heavenly flowers to alight

¹⁴ **Great Teacher Quán** is unknown to me.

¹⁵ **Fayan** Wenyi (885-958, aka Qīngliáng), a fifteenth-generation successor in China in the Xuefeng line.

¹⁶ **Xuedou** Chongxian (980-1052), a sixteenth-generation successor in China through Zhimen Guangzuo in the Yunmen line.

¹⁷ **Subhuti**, 空生, DDB: “Producer of emptiness, the arhat who expounded the doctrine of emptiness, i.e., one of the ten great pupils of the Buddha.” This and the next line of this verse, though, seem like references to Shariputra in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*.

This verse tells of Subhuti sitting in meditation while Indra rained flowers from the heavens. Now Lǔzǔ cannot end the trouble stirred up by the point-by-point examination of this group of old men, including Nánquán and Xuánshā. This is precisely, “Carved jade loses its purity.” This is not as good as “A pearl in a deep pool is beautiful in itself.”

In *The History of the Jin Dynasty*, Lù Jī’s esteemed poem says:¹⁸

The mountains’ radiance is due to the jade gathered in stone
The river’s beauty is due to pearls within the water

The jade within the stone is cut out by Nánquán. The pearls within the water are strained out by Xuánshā. Fortunately and naturally, “Utterly cool, fresh air – distinct from the grinding heat of autumn.” Exactly because, “One wisp of a leisurely cloud divides sky and water.”

I, Wànsōng, have never faced a wall. What have you come here seeking to embellish?

A substitute saying for myself: I have heard Tiāntóng’s verse commentary on this old case.

¹⁸ Lu Ji (261-303), MDBG: “Chinese writer and literary critic.”

Appendix

from Yamada Koun Roshi's commentary on *Shoyoroku*, Case 23:

Yamada Koun Roshi: This *koan* itself is relatively straightforward, as is this Instruction. At the beginning of his comments on this koan in his *Soliloquy on the Book of Equanimity* (*Shôyôroku Dokugo*), Yasutani Hakuun Roshi has written something very good, and I would like to start off by quoting from that commentary.

Yasutani Hakuun Roshi: Luzu was a dharma successor to Mazu and a brother in the dharma to Nanquan. You should clearly realize the spirit of zazen by means of Luzu's facing the wall.

Yamada Koun Roshi: Yasutani Roshi recorded most of the teisho of his master Harada Roshi and used them as the basis for his own *Dokugo* (*Soliloquy*) books, which means these are originally the words of Harada Sogaku Roshi, although Yasutani Roshi was writing in the same spirit. And it is in this spirit that he admonishes us to clearly realize what this "facing the wall" really means. He continues:

Yasutani Hakuun Roshi: Zazen here does not refer to so-called *bompu* Zen ("ordinary Zen", i.e., Zen practiced for health and well-being) or *gedô* Zen (non-Buddhist Zen) or so-called *hôben* Zen (literally, Zen as a means) as practiced in Hinayana Buddhism. All those sorts of Zen involve "leaking samadhi" (jap, *urojô*), and only concern "samadhi power" (*jôriki*). They're only concerned with power coming from concentration of mind or with mental concentration. If you apply yourself to these types of Zen you can make unending progress, but if you slacken your efforts you will be back where you started from as that power of concentration "leaks" away. The so-called Zen of no thought (*munen-musô*) is also such a Zen. You should be duly aware that all these involve collecting samadhi power of concentration that will leak away if you slacken your efforts.

Yamada Koun Roshi: I imagine most of you here are familiar with this, but we should take it clearly to heart. If we clearly realize enlightenment, it will definitely not leak away or disappear.

Yasutani Hakuun Roshi: The zazen referred to here is the authentic Zen transmitted by Buddhas and ancestors. It is the highest and wondrous ability that does not leak away. It is only transmitted from Buddha to Buddha; it is the samadhi that can freely be received and does not allow the slightest room for intrusion of false paths. You should clearly realize the true aspect of this "non-leaking Samadhi," which is different from

the “leaking samadhi” of ordinary Zen. “Although this dharma is copiously found in every person, it will not appear if we have not practiced, and cannot be obtained without our realizing it.”

This is the type of zazen spoken of here. I would especially like all persons of the Soto School to burn into their memories this single line of it’s not being able to be attained without realizing it. Needless to mention, these are the words of Dôgen Zenji.

Although the Buddha way is completely and intrinsically in every single person, unless you realize it, you will never be able to take hold of it. Words of this same spirit are found in profusion in all the chapters of the *Shôbôgenzô* and in the *Gakudô Yôjinshû*. Since the times of the Meiji Period, almost all the monks of the Soto School have fallen into the error of claiming that it is a mistake to seek enlightenment. But that itself is a major error. In order to save people belonging to this stream of mere intellectual understanding of these works, we make a division into three of the objectives or goals of Zen in explaining things. Of course, this does not mean that there are three separately existing goals; we simply make a division in order that people can better understand what is being said.

The first goal is developing concentration of mind. This is the only aspect that is common to all forms of Zen. The second goal is realizing our true nature. Unless there is this aspect, it is not the authentically transmitted Zen. “The proof is in the pudding,” as they say. Beginning with Shakyamuni Buddha and continuing down the lineage of ancestors in India, China and Japan, there has not been one of these many Zen masters who has not realized their true nature. It is only when the kensho experience is confirmed by a master who has inka shômei and who has had an experience of kensho that one can be permitted to become a master of Zen.

Even when we look at Dôgen Zenji’s *Gakudô Yôjinshû*, it is most clear that this is an iron rule of the Buddha Way. Even the Lotus Sutra contains the line: “The main reason for the myriad Buddhas appearing in the world was only to have sentient beings open and realize Buddha knowledge and views.”

“Buddha knowledge and views” is the wisdom of satori, the prajna wisdom. However, there seem to be professors at Buddhist universities teaching that, since Shakyamuni Buddha came to enlightenment for us, there is no need for us to come to enlightenment, a truly deplorable state of affairs. That is like saying that, since our ancestors ate their rice, their descendants can exist without eating rice.

Yamada Koun Roshi: Professor Kôdô Kurebayashi, a doctor of letters, is actually saying that it is enough to believe (in the Buddha’s enlightenment). He says that because Shakyamuni Buddha came to that experience and proclaimed it as free of error, any

attempts to come to enlightenment oneself are the actions of a band of unbelievers who do not believe the words of Shakyamuni Buddha. If that's the case, it was a great error for the ancestors throughout the generations to come to enlightenment and most unseemly. And these are evidently the teachings of a professor at a Buddhist university. One can only shake one's head in dismay.

Yasutani Hakuun Roshi: The third goal is personalization of the Supreme Way. If body and mind are in accordance with the authentically transmitted *zazen*, that *zazen* itself is the full manifestation of the Supreme Way, whether we have realized it or not. In other words, it is a matter of truly revealing and truly practicing what has been realized. This is expressed by the words "practice and realization are not two" (*shushô-funi*). Viewing *zazen* from an unenlightened standpoint, it is known as the "realization within the practice" (*shuchû no shô*), and from the standpoint of one who has already realized, it is "practice on top of realization" (*shôjô no shu*).

Well, then, what does it mean to say that "body and mind are both in accordance with the authentically transmitted Zen?" As for the body, if we practice as expounded in the "manuals of Zen practice" (*zazengi*), that is all right. But do they know what to do as far as the mind is concerned? There are the words of Dôgen Zenji in the *Fukanzazengi*: "Think not-thinking" (*fushiryô tei wo shiryô suru*).

But even though we can say such words, if it is not clear what they mean, it won't be possible to put them into practice. Don't confuse things by saying this is talking about reaching a state of no-thought (*munen-musô*). Such an approach is Hinayana-Zen (*shôjô-zen*), it is "leaking Zen," in the sense of samadhi power that leaks away when one fails to practice. It should be evident from what Dôgen exhorts us to do, that just reaching a state of no-thought will not do.

But what do Dôgen's words "non-thinking" (*hishiryô*) actually mean? In his footnote explaining the word, the scholar says that the Chinese characters for "non" (*hi*) are not a matter of eliminating something but the "true aspect of thinking" (*shiryô no shinjittai*), which only proves that they don't understand what it means. And one can only shake one's head in dismay in hearing them talk about "practice and enlightenment as not two." How can you know what is meant by "practice and enlightenment as one" just nodding off like that?

Yamada Koun Roshi: Yasutani Roshi has only words of abuse for such practices. But what is actually meant by "non-thinking" (*hishiryô*) in Dôgen Zenji's text? It is just MU; that is "non-thinking." It's enough to devote yourself to the practice of MU. Not-thinking is non-thinking. Then what should we do? This is actually something that should be discussed in the dokusan room, but if I were to attempt an explanation now,

I would say that it is enough to sit wholeheartedly with MU. It is enough to sit single-mindedly with the koan. The Roshi continues:

Yasutani Hakuun Roshi: Well, then, it wouldn't be much trouble to write about the essence of "non-thinking," but I'll refrain from that here since there are people who will just parrot what I say. It's not that I would balk at saying it. It's just because I value the dharma and would dislike falsehoods from emerging. If you want to know, then come to me in dokusan and ask in all earnestness. But for those who don't have the right attitude for receiving the teaching, it would be a waste of time and do more harm than good.

Let me make a comparison of the Zen spirit of the Soto School and that of the Rinzai School. Both of them have strong and weak points. The Soto tradition puts the emphasis on the third goal of personalizing the supreme way, and has a spirit by which the second goal of realization is found within that third goal. This is the attitude of Dôgen Zenji.

The Rinzai School puts the emphasis on the second goal of realization and has a spirit by which the third goal of personalization is found within that second goal. For this reason, Rinzai Zen puts the emphasis on koans and neglects the practice of just sitting (*shikantaza*), while Soto Zen puts emphasis on just sitting and neglects koan study.

Starting with Dôgen Zenji and continuing with Keizan Zenji and the Zen worthies over the generations, they used koans freely when the occasion demanded it, as the historical annals attest to. There has never been a tradition in the Soto School saying that it is erroneous to resort to koans. This is something that Zen teachers lacking an enlightened eye have started to say beginning in the Meiji Period.

Present-day Soto Zen speaks nominally in terms of just sitting (*shikantaza*), but the true content of *shikantaza* is lacking. What it is, is Hinayana Zen (*shôjôzen*) of no thought, or it has descended to the level of mere *bonpu-zen* that simply involves developing concentration of mind. But now people who even practice Zen are as few as the stars at dawn. The present state of things is such that the majority of monks of the Soto School cannot even sit in the full-lotus position.

I am not saying that I do not like the Soto School, but evidently you are considered a "strange fellow" in the Soto School if you practice zazen. What a terrible state of affairs. It can't be helped if laypersons like us are called strange because we practice zazen, but when even monks are considered strange for practicing zazen, it's a total disaster. And on top of that there are university professors saying that there is no need to practice zazen, that it is enough to have an intellectual understanding of Zen teachings.

They're really causing things to fester and rot! And this is actually the reason that the conclusions of Buddhist doctrine are not correctly understood.

From olden times, the Rinzai School has placed emphasis on Zen involving a stepwise process, while the Soto School has emphasized the Zen of no steps. This tendency has been evident in the Soto School since the time of Yuanwu Zenji and Hongzhi Zenji. Actually, however, the authentically transmitted Zen can be expressed as follows: steps are no other than no steps, no steps are no other than steps.

This is known as the “dharma gate of oneness of cause and effect” (*inga ichinyo no hômon*). “Cause and effect” is the Zen of stepwise practice. “Oneness” (*ichinyo*) is the Zen of no steps. There is no real Buddhism unless both are present. It will not do to imagine that emphasizing one side is half of the truth. If there is only one aspect, then the whole is false. Whether it's a matter of satori or no-satori, steps or no-steps, whether you fall into having or not having, they are both false. They are untrue.

Yamada Koun Roshi: This is what Yasutani Roshi says in his commentary. Please take time to appreciate these words.