

CASE 3

***The Indian King Invites the  
Patriarch***



By Yamada Kôun

***A king of Eastern India invited the twenty-seventh patriarch, Prajnatarā, for Buddhist food. The King asked, “Why don’t you recite sutras?”***

***Prajnatarā said, “My inhalation does not stay in the world of subject, or in the world of consciousness, my exhalation does not tangle with the world of objects. Still, I am always reciting millions and millions of scrolls of sutras.”***

*Verse:*

***The cloud rhinoceros plays with the moon, its jewel-like shimmer containing light.***

***The wooden horse cavorts in the spring, free and unfettered.***

***Under the eyebrows two cold blue eyes.***

***What need to read sutras ’til you make a hole in the cowhide?***

***The clear mind transcends kalpas, the hero’s strength breaks through myriad barriers.***

***The wondrously round wheel hole turns the spirit activity.***

***Han-shan forgot the way by which he came.***

***Shih-tou held his hand as they returned together.***

*On the Instruction:*

As I am always telling you, zazen is a matter of clearly grasping your true self. But the true self is difficult to realize, even though we might imagine we understand. It’s essential to have a clear and thoroughgoing grasp of that true self. And until you’ve done so completely, your true self will remain unclear. What is the true self? In today’s main case, our true self appears as what we could call “just this sutra” (jap, *nyozekyô*). When you sit, there is just that sitting. When you stand, there is just that standing. When you see, there is just that seeing. When you hear, there is just that hearing. One act follows the other in succession without stop. This is what is known as the “just this sutra.” Prajnatarā could be said to have had a close affiliation to this sutra. His story is found in Chapter 27 of the *Transmission of Light* (Denkôroku).

Let us look now at the Instruction:

***An activity not appearing before the kalpas.*** A kalpa is an infinitely long period of time. According to one story, it is the time it would require for a

block of solid stone measuring forty-four Chinese miles on each side to be worn away to nothing if an angel were to descend from heaven every one hundred years and brush the stone just once with his feather cape. In other words, it is an unimaginably long period of time. That means we are dealing here with the world prior to even the slightest movement of consciousness. In a word, it is the essential world, the world of Mu.

In the world of Mu there is no time, no space, no movement. The Instruction is speaking about the activity that emerges from the essential world, from the world of Mu. In our koan study it is what is known as the “source of Mu.” Students who are given this koan will struggle to find the source of Mu. Even though we speak in terms of “the source of Mu,” it does not mean there is no activity. In fact, all activity emerges from there, even though we don’t know how such a thing is possible. The activity emerging from there has nothing to do with the so-called discriminating consciousness. It transcends all comparisons made in the mind, such as “this is good or that is bad.” This is what is meant by the phrase, “the blind tortoise heads for the fire.”

A tortoise that could see would notice that there was a fire and avoid the danger. But because the turtle is blind it takes no heed and proceeds toward the fire. This is referring to that which transcends all *a posteriori* knowledge and judgment or discriminating consciousness. The purpose of Zen is to grasp the world expressed in these lines of the Instruction.

**A single phrase transmitted separately outside the teachings.** This is referring to the same world. It means the single phrase that is transmitted outside the sutras. The sutras are *explanations* of the true fact. Thus, no matter how skillfully it is preached, it cannot express the true fact. So long as we are thinking intellectually, no matter how eloquently it is preached, it cannot be preached. The true place is beyond thought. The true fact is found in the place that cannot be transmitted by thought. If you clearly grasp this world, the world of Mu, then all words that emerge from that experience can be considered to be a single phrase transmitted separately outside the teachings. What is such a phrase? “Good morning,” would be fine. Or, “It’s really cold today.” And furthermore, there is nothing that emerges from any place other than this. Everything emerges from there. If you have not realized this world, you are under the sway of dualistic concepts and will say that our thoughts come from the brain. But that is not true. The brain is just a tool that the mind uses. And furthermore:

**The mortar handle lets flowers bloom.** What does it mean to say that the handle of a stone mortar can allow flowers to bloom from it? Putting it more simply, we could say that the flower blooms out of stone. What is this referring to? It is no other than “the single phrase transmitted separately outside the teachings.” What is a flower that blooms from stone? We are speaking of a diamond stone that is so hard it can never be cut. For there is nothing harder than nothing! Indeed, it transcends all differences of hard and soft. The poet can therefore say that the mortar handle lets flowers bloom. Expressing it more clearly, we can say that emptiness gives birth to flowers. You may know the phrase “the lotus in the midst of the fire.” It is the lotus that never withers, no matter what happens. That lotus appears out of nowhere. And here it is known as “the mortar handle that lets flowers bloom.” This phrase could possibly have been written as the second part of a couplet of which the phrase about the blind turtle forms the first part.

**Just say: Do you have the ability to receive and maintain, to read and memorize?** Receiving, maintaining, reading and memorizing are

references to the Main Case that speaks about reading sutras. The author asks if there are any persons who know how to receive and maintain, to read and recite. In other words, are there any persons who clearly understand the world he has been talking about up to now? Let us proceed now to the Main Case.

*On the Case:*

**A king of Eastern India invited the twenty-seventh patriarch, Prajnatarā, for Buddhist food.**

India was formerly divided into many kingdoms. This particular kingdom in Eastern India was evidently not that large, although we have no details. At any rate, the king of that kingdom greatly revered Prajnatarā and converted to Buddhism. He then regularly invited Prajnatarā to his court, serving him each time a special meal, which was given by Buddhists to priests. Evidently Prajnatarā never read any sutras on that occasion, although it was customary for the monk to first recite sutras before receiving alms. But Prajnatarā never did so. This prompted the king to ask:

“Why don’t you recite sutras?”

In reply, Prajnatarā said:

“My inhalation does not stay in the world of subject.”

In other words, his inhalation has no connection with the subjective world. The Chinese character translated here as subjective world is *in*. It has the same basic meaning as skandha (*on*) as found in the line in the *Prajnaparamita Hr̥dya Sutra*:

*The Bodhisattava Avalokitesvara, practicing deep Prajna Paramita,  
Clearly saw that all five skandhas are empty.*

*Transforming all suffering and distress.*

Nevertheless, the nuance of the word here is slightly different. Here we can understand it as referring to the self. Our common sense tells us that the self emerges from the mind and the body. The body is known as “form.” It is form in the phrase “form is no other than emptiness.” Not only the body, but all things of the objective world that we can see or perceive are known as form. The word “five skandhas” refers to aggregates of all phenomena which, when piled up together, embrace all aspects of the self. In addition to form, the other skandhas are as follows. Sensation (*jap, ju*) refers to the activity by which both pain and pleasure are received. Conception (*sō*) refers to the activity of creating concepts in the mind. Functioning of mind (*gyo*) refers to the activity of the mind that is constantly changing according to the law of causation. In modern language we would speak about the temporal transition of the will. The mental faculty (*shiki*) refers to discriminating value judgment by which we judge that one thing is better than another, for example. The activities of the mind are summed up in these four elements of sensation, conception, functioning of mind and mental faculty. These are combined with the body (form) to produce five. These are known as the five skandhas (*go'on*). In modern language, however, we would speak in terms of subject and object. Prajnatarā says that his inhalation has no connection with the subjective world.

**My exhalation does not tangle with the world of objects.** The original Chinese translated here as “the world of objects” means “the myriad relations.” The objective world is the world that comes into being in accordance with the law of causation. Prajnatarā says that his inhalation has no relation to the subjective world and that his exhalation has no relation to the objective world. Subject and object are constructs of the mind; they are not the true fact. The true reality has no connection with subject and object.

**Still, I am always reciting millions and millions of scrolls of sutras.**

From morning to evening he is reciting millions of scrolls of the Sutra of Just This. It is the sutra of our true self, as I mentioned before. Immediately after kensho, Zen students examine the so-called *Miscellaneous Koans*. One of those koans reads: *All Buddhas and the dharma of the the Supreme and Unexcelled Enlightenment emerge from this sutra. What is this sutra?*

This saying is originally found in the *Diamond Sutra*. All sutras come from this sutra. All dharmas preached by all Buddhas come from this sutra. It might seem as if it were referring to the Diamond Sutra. That is not false, but it does not mean the Diamond Sutra printed on paper. The same koan collection includes the phrase “Diamond Paramita Sutra.” In other words, it is the revelation of the true self every minute of the day. This is what is meant by “millions and millions of scrolls of sutras.” Prajnatarā was the teacher of Bodhidharma. According to the account in the *Transmission of Light*, his name when he was still a child was Keyura. His own teacher was the twenty-sixth patriarch Punyamitra who encountered a fervent convert to Buddhism in a king of eastern India. One day when Punyamitra was riding in a cart, he happened to see a youth on the side of the road whose name was Keyura. He looked at the youth and asked him, “Do you remember past events?” The youth said, “I remember in a distant eon I was living in the same place as you; you were expounding great wisdom and I was reciting the most profound scripture.” This is actually a koan. Realizing that this was no ordinary youth, he took him to the castle of the king, eventually giving him the name Prajnatarā.

The *Sutra of Just This* (Nyozeikyô) means the Prajna-Paramita Diamond Sutra. We proceed now to the Verse.

*On the Verse:*

**The cloud rhinoceros plays with the moon, its jewel-like shimmer containing light.**

**The wooden horse cavorts in the spring, free and unfettered.**

There is no doubt that these two lines are speaking about the lines in the Main Case: “My inhalation does not stay in the world of subject, or in the world of consciousness, my exhalation does not tangle with the world of objects.” But in addition, as Yasutani Roshi says in his teisho on this koan, they also refer to the activity that does not have anything to do with discriminating thought, that is, the essential world itself. Briefly put, it is “an activity not appearing before the kalpas.” But since we are dealing here with a poem, it is more interesting to gain some of the poetic feeling in addition to just the literal meaning of the words. There is an even older poem containing the line: “The rhinoceros plays with the moon, causing streaks in the clouds.” The rhinoceros moves freely through the water and attempts to catch the moon reflected in the water, but is unable to do so. His horn, wet with moisture, reflects the moon. This earlier poem was used as the basis for the present poem. A cloud rhinoceros means a rhinoceros covered by clouds, a reference to the world of complete darkness. This completely dark rhinoceros plays with the moon and contains light, glistening like a jewel. What is meant by the totally dark rhino? Putting it more simply, I would like to see this as a reference to the source of Mu. There is the line in the *Sandokai*: “Right in darkness there is light.”

We can't know a single thing about our true self. This is known as darkness. The Chinese characters for “dark” or “black” are used in Zen literature to express the essential world. The characters for “bright” or “white” are used to

express the phenomenal world. The cloud rhinoceros is the same as “black” or “dark.” This world has a completely free activity. It can see, it can hear, it can talk, it can do anything.

***Its jewel-like shimmer containing light.***

Recall the following lines from the *Sandokai*:

*Right in light there is darkness, but don't confront it as darkness;*

*Right in darkness there is light, but don't see it as light.*

***The wooden horse cavorts in the spring, free and unfettered.***

The “wooden horse” means the essential world where there are no discriminating thoughts. Because it is a wooden horse, it has absolutely no consciousness. And because of this it is completely free of any fetters and can move about freely. Some commentators take this as a renewed reference to the lines in the Main Case: “My inhalation does not stay in the world of subject, or in the world of consciousness, my exhalation does not tangle with the world of objects.” But it is not limited only to that meaning. Briefly put, we are enjoying the perfect freedom of the essential self. How do we enjoy that freedom? When we have something to do, we stand up. When we have finished it, we sit down again. When we are in a hurry, we run. When we are hungry, we eat something. This is the actual meaning of “free and unfettered” in the verse.

***Under the eyebrows two cold blue eyes.***

His eyes are flashing from under his eyebrows. And because those eyes are blue, we are not dealing here with a Japanese person. From beneath those eyebrows, the unflinching eyes send forth a stern light. And before such eyes, “what need to read sutras 'til you make a hole in the cowhide?”

In other words, there is no need whatsoever to read sutras. For a person such as Prajnatara there is no need to read sutras written on paper. Some of you might be familiar with Zen master Yakusan Igen Zenji. At his very strict dojo, the monks were only allowed to sit. They weren't allowed to read and there were no teishos. In fact, the regimen was so strict there that few monks came to study with him. There were usually only about twenty monks practicing there.

Although the rules stipulated that the monks were not to read sutras, Yakusan himself read them on occasion. One of the monks wanted to know why they were forbidden to read the sutras although their master could read them. Yakusan Zenji replied, “I am only blocking my eyes. I am just putting a book in front of my eyes, but not reading it.” Which is to say, there are no thoughts in his head.

“Well then,” the monk wanted to know, “wouldn't it be all right for us to read them as well?”

In reply, Yakusan Zenji said, “If you monks are to read sutras, the light of your eyes must penetrate to the back of the paper.” More simply put, you must read so that your eyes penetrate even cowhide. That is the source of this line in the verse. In other words, there is no need to do so!

***The clear mind transcends kalpas, the hero's strength breaks through myriad barriers.***

The word for “clear” (jap, *meihaku*) originally appears in the *Shinjinmei* (Poem on the Mind of Faith):

*The Supreme Way is without difficulty, it just dislikes picking and choosing.*

*If there is neither hating nor loving, everything is open and clear.*

If there is nothing in the mind, it is just like a perfectly clear mirror, reflecting things exactly as they are. There is no self blocking the view. When you see, there is just that seeing. When you hear, there is just that hearing. When you are sad, there is just that crying. That is what is meant by the “clear mind.” Although we

say “if there is neither hating or loving,” if we don’t like someone, feelings of dislike arise. What about then? This must be examined as a koan. If there is hating, then there is a concept of dualistic opposition in which I am here and you are there, separate from me. For this reason, we feel anger and dislike towards the one who does not do what we want. But in this “clear mind” there is no duality. It is always one. It fills the entire universe and there is no other. This clear mind transcends the kalpas. That means it transcends time and space. It has no beginning and no end. It is the world that Bodhidharma refers to in his phrase “vast emptiness, nothing holy.”

***The hero’s strength breaks through myriad barriers.***

The “hero” refers here to Prajnatara. He can break through all concepts and distinctions. He can break through barrier upon barrier of thoughts, passing through all delusive knowledge and emotions.

***The wondrously round wheel hole turns the spirit activity.***

This is another reference to our true essence. This true essence of ours extends out in complete freedom. Our true self has a wonderful activity.

***Han-shan forgot the way by which he came.***

***Shih-tou held his hand as they returned together.***

Now Han-shan and Shih-tou appear on the scene. They might not appear to have any connection to the koan, but that is not necessarily so. Han-shan is actually the appearance of the Bodhisattva Manjusri who is a symbol of the essential world of not a single thing. In contrast, the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra (jap, Fugen Bosatsu) is the symbol of compassion, possessing the activity of saving all beings. Manjusri alone cannot save all beings. For, in seeking to save sentient beings, we realize that there are no sentient beings to save. There must be both (Manjusri and Samantabhadra) if there is to be the religious activity of saving all beings. For this reason, the Buddhist altar always contains these two figures on both sides of the Buddha. They represent the two aspects of the great mind of compassion as embodied in Samantabhadra and Manjusri, the latter of whom teaches us of the world of nothingness to aid us. Shakyamuni Buddha has general control over them. You might be familiar with the collection of poems known as *Cold Mountain* (Hanshan). Although it is not known for certain if there was such as person known as Hanshan, the story goes that there was the temple Kokuzeiji, which was the practice hall of Manjusri. Residing there was the Zen master known as Bukan Zenji. One day, a person named Ryokyūin visited Bukan Zenji there. When he entered the temple via the kitchen, he saw two strange persons there who looked like children, but also like old men. Ryokyūin went to Bukan Zenji and told him about the two strange characters in the kitchen, asking if he knew who they were. In reply, Bukan Zenji said, “Those two are reincarnations of Manjusri and Samantabhadra. Go and bow to them.” Ryokyūin went to the kitchen and bowed to the two fellows. “What are you doing that for?” they both wanted to know. “Upon coming here to visit Bukan Zenji, I was told that you are Manjusri and Samantabhadra.”

“Oh, is that so?” they said. “Well, Bukan Zenji is a reincarnation of Amida Buddha.” Hearing this, Ryokyūin wanted to go back to Bukan Zenji and bowed to him. But when he went back there was no one there. Thinking it strange, he returned to the kitchen but here again, there was no one in sight!

The *Han Shan* poems include the following verse:

*Looking for a refuge  
Cold Mountain will keep you safe  
a faint wind stirs dark pines*

*come closer the sound gets better  
below them sits a gray-haired man  
chanting Taoist texts  
ten years unable to return  
he forgot the way he came*

*A faint wind stirs dark pines  
Come close the sound gets better*

These lines can actually be examined as a koan. Please try to come up with a good presentation.

*Ten years unable to return  
he forgot the way he came*

This is actually a reference to the essential world. It is the world of Mu, where there is no road at all. This is the world of Manjusri. Manjusri, not knowing where to return to, is standing there in a daze. Thus Shih-tou gives his hand and offers to show him the way to return. What does this mean? It means that the essential world and the phenomenal world are completely one. Just the phenomenal world alone is of no use. Just the essential world alone is of no use. It is important that they become completely one. This is symbolized in today's poem by the line in which Shih-tou guides Han-shan, who has forgotten the way. It is the world of us human beings. Unless we return from the deep mountains to the world of human beings, our practice is of no use. This is what these final lines of the poem are talking about.