

CASE 100

Rōya's "Mountains and Rivers"



By Yamada Kōun

Instruction:

"One word can make a nation rise, one word can make a nation fall;"
This medicine can kill people and can give people life."
The benevolent person sees it and names it benevolence,
The wise person sees it and calls it wisdom."
Tell me, where is the profit and where is the loss?

Case:

A monk asked Master Kaku of Rōya, "The essential state is pure and clear; how are mountains, rivers and the great earth produced at once?"

Kaku said, "The essential state is pure and clear; how are mountains, rivers and the great earth produced at once?"

Verse:

Seeing a being, he does not consider it to be a being;
He turns his hand over and turns it back.
The man on Mt. Rōya
Does not yield to Gautama.

On the Instruction:

Being able to examine this final case of the *Book of Equanimity* with you today must be seen as the result of deep karma connections. The same holds, of course, for the first case, but its also wonderful being able to examine this final case with you today. In that sense, the persons present here today to hear this final teisho enjoy a deep karmic connection and good fortune. As I always say, the Instruction is always written with the Main Case in mind. Let us look now at that Instruction.

"One word can make a nation rise, one word can make a nation fall;"

These words have their origin in the *Analects of Confucius*. As they say, a single word can cause a nation to flourish and a single word can cause the demise of the nation. From the Zen standpoint, to say that one word can make a nation fall means that a single word can "kill" a person. And to say that a single word can make the nation rise means to bring a person to life. Killing and giving life in Zen do not mean physically killing or causing to live. To kill means to cut off all our discriminating thinking and conceptualizing. With a single word, we cut off all such ideas. "Killing" means to completely eliminate any such concepts, to cut them off completely. And if you truly cut them off, in that instant the great life appears (daikatsu genjō). A truly new world suddenly appears. This is what is known as satori. When all our concepts disappear, in that instant new life wells up, and this is known as satori or

enlightenment. Thus, a single word can suffice to kill and give new life. For example, if you ask what such a word is, I can point to the word Mu. If you practice Mu and become one with Mu, not a single thought can arise, and in that instant you suddenly realize. What do you realize? You realize your true self. But this is definitely not easy to do, even though it might seem easy in theory. It's a matter of continuing the practice of Mu (muji no nentei) tirelessly, when breathing in and breathing out. You must continue on no matter how long it takes. In the process you forget yourself. And when you completely forget yourself in the practice of Mu, you become completely one with Mu. It's a matter of melting into Mu. I speak about this practice any number of times, but many people are unable to reach that point. I see people who I haven't seen in a while and ask them if they have brought a "souvenir," so to speak, in the sense of being able to show me their understanding of Mu. But in many cases they are unable to do so. I would like you all to bring that souvenir as soon as possible. The joy upon realizing Mu is beyond comparison. You will feel that you could die at any time having realized this. You will feel that it was definitely worth being born into this world, that life was worth living no matter whether you do anything outstanding after that or not. And to repeat, to grasp Mu is to grasp your own true self. With that you have the key to solve all of life's problems. In *Mumon's Commentary* to Case 1 of the *Mumonkan* (Gateless Gate), there is the following passage: "It will be as if you have grasped the sword of General Kan." You will be able to cut down anything in your way, in the sense of cutting down all concepts and ideas. This is found in the fervent practice of Mu. This is how we should understand these first words of the Instruction.

This medicine can kill people and can give people life. What is the "medicine"? It is your true self. You can also consider it to be Mu. A truly capable Zen master can cut off all concepts and thoughts in a single word, as if it were a single stroke of a sword. And then you clearly realize your own true self. The joy at that moment is beyond description.

Zen Master Gutei simply held up a finger whatever he was asked about Zen. This single finger has the power to kill people and to give them life in the sense just explained. All koans can be understood in that way.

The benevolent person sees it and names it benevolence,

The wise person sees it and calls it wisdom. As this is a reference to the way of Mencius, it speaks in terms of "the benevolent person." From our point of view, it can be seen as meaning the Buddhas and patriarchs. Looking at the workings of Mu, they call it "benevolence" (Chinese: ren, Japanese: jin). This comes from deep compassion and love, or one could say grace. It is the compassion of wanting somehow to bring others to peace of mind, of wanting to deliver them from their sufferings. This is known as compassion (jihi) in Buddhism: the desire to save others in some way. "The wise person" means a person who has truly grasped the essence of the human being, out of which arises a wisdom that can be used freely. Such a person is considering how to guide others toward salvation. For example, the Zen master, in his position of guiding others in practice, must have such wisdom. He needs such wisdom to know where the student is in his or her practice. This must be clearly apparent to the master. He then knows very readily how best to lead that person in practice. Only compassion is insufficient. When it gets down to it, unless you have had an experience of clearly grasping your own true self, you will not know where the student is in her or his practice. This is a very important matter. For example, when a primary student comes to you, you treat that child accordingly. When a layperson with a family comes to you, you consider the level of that person and give him the guidance most appropriate to him.

Tell me, where is the profit and where is the loss? "Profit and loss" can be understood here as meaning "making a nation rise or fall," as was mentioned in the first line of this Instruction. On one hand he can kill people and on the other hand he can cause them to come to life. "Where is the root source of that activity?" the Instruction asks us. An example will now be given and we are exhorted to look carefully at what transpires in the Main Case.

On the Case:

A monk asked Master Kaku of Rôya, "The essential state is pure and clear; how are mountains, rivers and the great earth produced at once?" Master Kaku of Rôya was Master Ekaku, with "E" meaning wisdom. Rôya was the name of the mountain where he lived. He was eighth in succession in the line of Hyakujô Ekai Zenji. Hyakujô was blessed with many outstanding successors. First we can mention Obaku, or we could cite Isan, who together with Kyôzan was the founder of the Isan School of Zen. In that same line we find master Shuzan Shônen. It was Bunyô Zenshō who inherited Shuzan's dharma. There were actually two streams: The Ôryu Stream and the Bunyô Stream. This was a major bifurcation within the Rinzai School. Ekaku of Rôya was the successor to this Bunyô, which means he is in the Rinzai tradition. When we look at this case, we can see that he had a very clear dharma eye.

One day a monk came to this master and quoted this text: "The essential state is pure and clear; how are mountains, rivers and the great earth produced at once?"

Our true self or the true fact is pure and clear. That is because it is completely empty, there is not a single thing. This is known also as the essential world. It is the world of not a single thing. That means it is beauty itself. And issuing from it are mountains, rivers, the great earth, the moon and the sun and the stars. "How do they suddenly come into being?" the monk wants to know. How do all those phenomena arise from the pure essence? He cannot understand it. In other words, how do the myriad phenomena arise from essential nature or from the essential world? If his interlocutor had been a scientist, he might have answered in logical terms, saying it arises out of nothing. But the way of treating this question in the Zen tradition is somewhat different.

The essential state is pure and clear; how are mountains, rivers and the great earth produced at once? (*shô-jô-hon-nen-un-ga-kosshô-sen-ga-daichi*). There is essentially no meaning to the words, it is just: *shô-jô-hon-nen-un-ga-kosshô-sen-ga-daichi*. If there were any meaning to the words, it would only be a concept. (Roshi strikes the rostrum with his kotsu). You have to listen to those words in the same way as this sound. That's how I used to explain it, and it's not wrong. Nowadays, however, I have a slightly different view, which is proof that my way of seeing the koans is evolving. Zen Master Kaku replies: The essential state is pure and clear; how are mountains, rivers and the great earth produced at once? (*shô-jô-hon-nen-un-ga-kosshô-sen-ga-daichi*). He is producing for the monk where they come from. As I will be mentioning later, all things in the phenomenal world—our body, hands, this rostrum, etc. have two aspects. The first aspect is the phenomenal aspect. The other aspect is the essential world. You might think these are two different things, but actually they are one and the same. Usually we are only familiar with the back of the hand and remain unaware of the palm of the hand, which symbolizes the essential world. Unless you realize this directly in an enlightenment experience, you will not know that world. The world of phenomena is the world of dualistic opposition. But most people are not even aware of the existence of this essential world, the world of oneness. When you get right down to it, they are simply attempting to understand it conceptually or philosophically, while remaining ignorant of the truth. After all is said and done, you must come to a direct experience of it and appreciate for yourself. Otherwise you will remain unable to see the world of emptiness. You might think there is something like an essential world on which the phenomenal world is based, but actually they are one. Like the back of my hand and the palm of my hand, they live the same single life. When you look at the world, you might assume that the Soviets are the "bad guys" and the Americans are the "good guys." Actually, however, they are on equal footing in the same sumo ring, you might say. I would somehow like to make the leaders in the U.S. and the Soviet Union aware of the real world. The true world is the world of zero, where there is no dualistic opposition. Unless we become aware of this world, humanity will not really come to peace no matter how much time goes by. I would like the people practicing here from abroad to sit their very best and come to true realization, and then return to their countries. I sometimes have the feeling that they are more diligent in their practice than the Japanese. There is the saying in the Bible about a single grain of wheat planted in the ground. When ten or twenty years

have passed, it might not become something outstanding. But in the course of one hundred or two hundred years, it will gradually sprout and grow. Then true peace will come to the world. Please do your very best. I would like you all to become such a grain of wheat. The essential state is pure and clear; how are mountains, rivers and the great earth produced at once? (shō-jō-hon-nen-un-ga-kosshō-sen-ga-daichi). If you can hear this in the same way as the stick banging the rostrum, it is the essential world itself, and not just an expression thereof. The monk asks his question about where it all comes from, and Master Kaku produces that world of emptiness for him. He has given a sample of it. These days, I have the feeling that this is the better way to view this case.

On the Verse:

Seeing a being, he does not consider it to be a being;

He turns his hand over and turns it back. This is precisely what I was just talking about. Although the phenomenal world might appear to have form, for those who have opened their dharma eye, its content is empty. He has clearly realized that. Although there is being, at the same time there is not a single thing. That is what is meant by the phrase: “seeing a being, he does not consider it to be a being.” When he turns his hand over, that is the phenomenal world. As I was saying just now, my hand has two sides. But actually they are the same single hand. The back of my hand cannot move on its own, nor can the palm of my hand. I would like to make the politicians in other nations somehow aware of this fact. For those politicians know better than anyone that disputes cannot be the solution. They are gravely aware of how allowing disputes to get out of hand could be calamitous. That is the reason for my wishing to somehow make these people aware of this world of oneness, the true world.

The man on Mt. Rōya

Does not yield to Gautama. The “man on Mt. Rōya” is a reference to Master Kaku of Rōya. “Gautama” means Shakyamuni Buddha. The poet is saying that we should not be under the control of Buddha. Master of Kaku of Rōya is every bit a match for the Buddha and has his own views of things. He has no need to be taught by the Buddha. When you realize your own true nature, that is only natural. It’s not a matter of gobbling the dregs of the Buddha. In his teisho on this koan, Yasutani Roshi writes: “Where are mountains, rivers, the great earth? Isn’t there only pure and clear?” That is certainly true. But at the same time, we could also say, “Isn’t there just mountains, rivers, the great earth?” Actually, the true fact is that there is neither pure and clear nor mountains, rivers, the great earth. What is there, then? Just this! (tada kore kore).