

**CASE 22**

***Gantō's Bow to the Kaatz***



By *Yamada Kōun*

*Instruction:*

Human beings are examined with words, water is checked with a stick.  
Sweeping grasses and witnessing the wind – this is what is normally applied.

What if all of a sudden a tiger with a burned tail springs out?

*Case:*

Gantō came to Tokusan. He straddled the threshold of the gate and asked, "Is this ordinary or is this holy?" Tokusan shouted, "Kaatz!" Gantō made a deep bow.

Hearing of this, Tōzan said, "Hardly anyone but Gantō could have accepted it that way."

Gantō said, "Old Tōzan can't tell between good and bad. At that time, I raised up with one hand and suppressed with the other."

*Verse:*

Foiling the attempt of the oncomer, holding the grip of authority;  
Things have rules after which they must be performed;  
Nations have laws that must not be violated.  
The guest reverently brings his gift, and the host becomes proud;  
The lord dislikes admonition, and the subordinates flatter (him).  
What is the meaning of Gantō's questioning Tokusan?  
One raising, one suppressing – observe well his mind and action!

***On the Instruction:***

Human beings are examined with words, water is checked with a stick. To say that water is checked with a stick means to insert a stick or staff in the water to find out

how deep it is. As for saying that human beings are examined with words, since this is said from a Zen standpoint, this is saying that when it comes to discovering how far a person has gone in his Zen practice, or whether he has a satori experience or not and, if so, how deep it is, the best way is to listen to his words, to listen to what he says. Indeed, there is no other way. There is the Japanese saying “the mouth is the source of calamity” (kuchi wa wazawai no moto). Say something, and you’re liable to bare your soul. That’s the reason for the saying here that “human beings are examined with words.” In his *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen Zenji also says that, in discerning whether someone has truly realized or not, the best way is examining his words. If you carefully examine his words, you will discover the level of his understanding. That is truly the case. It’s best to just keep quiet. Silence is golden, as the saying goes. As soon as you talk, you end up exposing yourself. That’s the meaning of this first line of the instruction: Human beings are examined with words, water is checked with a stick.

*Sweeping grasses and witnessing the wind- this is what is normally applied.* This means eliminating the grasses. In times of old, Zen practitioners went in search of outstanding clear-eyed masters and would then examine the particular style of the master. Most of the monks back then went on pilgrimage (jap, *angya*) in search of outstanding teachers. The outstanding monks of old searched out places overgrown with grass, which is the source of the saying “sweeping grasses and witnessing the wind,” in the sense of seeking out outstanding Zen masters and witnessing their particular style of teaching. If the person is of any mettle as a Zen practitioner, anyone could do that. One of the final koans in the *Gateless Gate* (*Mumonkan*) presents *Tosotsu’s Three Barriers*, which includes the following koan:

“The purpose of going around sweeping grasses and inquiring as to the subtle truth is only to realize the self nature. Now, you venerable monks, where is the self nature at this very moment?”

The expression “witnessing the wind” in today’s koan has the same meaning as “inquiring as to the subtle truth.” It means to admire the master’s noble character and mien in then practicing under his tutelage. The author says this is only to be expected of a Zen practitioner, that it is nothing unusual. However:

*What if all of a sudden a tiger with a burned tail springs out?* There was evidently a legend about such a tiger in ancient China. The story relates how a tiger changed form and turned into a human being, although there are cases where the tail remains. But unless that tail is burned off, the tiger cannot become a real human being. This is referring, therefore, to a tiger whose tail has been burned off completely. And if such a tiger were suddenly to jump out, how in the world would you deal with it? Ordinary methods won’t help in such a situation, since you’re dealing with a tiger with his tail burned off. Ordinarily we say that, when an unenlightened person experiences satori, he or she becomes a Buddha. This is actually what is being said here. It means dying the great death and coming to the great life. It asks us how we will deal with such a practitioner who has died the great death and come to life again. In this particular case, the sights are set on Gantō in making this statement. It has been

said from times of old that when a fish becomes a dragon, the tail is burned off, after which it becomes a dragon. It is also said that when a tiger becomes a human being, the tail is burned off, after which it becomes a person. There are evidently such oral traditions in China, and this lore is being used here in the instruction. It means a monk who has died the great death and come to the great life of enlightenment. This is certainly the best way to view it. And as I just mentioned, the author's sights are set on Gantō in making this statement.

**On the Case:**

Gantō came to Tokusan. He straddled the threshold of the gate and asked, "Is this ordinary or is this holy?" When reading this case we might have the impression that it is speaking of Gantō's first encounter or Dharma-exchange (*mondo*) with Tokusan, but that is not so. Old Man Banshō also mentions this in his Commentary to this case. Gantō actually first encountered Tōzan Gohon Daishi, and only after that encounter did he meet up with Tokusan. And there are other exchanges between Gantō and Tokusan that have been handed down to us. To repeat, the encounter recorded in today's case is not the first encounter between Gantō and Tokusan. He had probably practiced for some time under Tokusan's direction. One day he had a meeting with Tokusan, although it is not clear whether he went to Tokusan's hut to meet with him or not. He paused on the threshold and said, "Is this ordinary or is this holy?" "This" could be referring to himself, or to the other party in the exchange, or to both at the same time. "Is this an ordinary person or a saintly person?" he seems to be saying. He is full of spirit and verve. And when we ask why he poses such a question, we should recall that the human being has two aspects. The human being in the world of phenomena is the "ordinary person" (*bonpu*). On the other hand, viewing things from the standpoint of the essential world, he or she is Buddha, and in that sense "saintly" or "holy." "All beings by nature are Buddha," as Hakuin Zenji says. Seen in terms of our original form, each of us is Buddha, without exception. If the Buddha were to come now and observe you all sitting silently in zazen, you would all appear as Buddhas. As you all sit there listening to me, there may be all sorts of thoughts in your head, which are the cause of suffering. Seen from that aspect, we are all "ordinary persons" (*bonpu*). As I said there are these two aspects. When Gantō asks "Is this ordinary or is this holy?" if you say "ordinary" it's wrong, since it's not the totality. It's just half of the picture. And if you say "holy" or "intrinsically Buddha," that's also only half the picture. Well, then, what should we answer? There are several similar koans in the koan collections. Old Man Banshō's Commentary to this case also makes mention of this. Once, a non-Buddhist (jap. *gedō*, meaning a philosopher belonging to a tradition other than Buddhism) came to see Shakyamuni Buddha. He caught a sparrow and asked, "Alive or dead?" If the Buddha were to say "alive," he would immediately crush the sparrow in his hands. If the Buddha were to say "dead," he would immediately release it. Here again the question involves these two aspects. But the Buddha, great personage as he was, stood on the threshold to the room and asked, "Am I about to enter the room or to leave the room? If you say, I am entering the room, I will leave it.

If you say, I am leaving the room, I will enter it.” That’s what I call quick-witted! Nevertheless, I do not necessarily believe that today’s case involves the same thing. After all, the difference between “holy” and “ordinary” is not something we can see with our eyes. Case 55 of the *Book of Equanimity* concerns an exchange between Dōgo and Zengen, his disciple. Dōgo was an outstanding Zen master and the koan concerns a condolence call that the two men made at the house of an acquaintance. When they arrived, the deceased was already closed up in the coffin, so they no doubt paid their respects and recited sutras, I can imagine. Then Zengen rapped on the coffin and said, “Alive or dead?” In this case, too, there are two possible answers, just like today’s case. The physical body is dead, that is to say, in the phenomenal world the functions of the body have ceased. But the essence is the “master” who never dies. In reply, Dōgo says, “I won’t say living, I won’t say dead.” Zengen says, “Why won’t you say it?” Once again Dōgo says, “I won’t say, I won’t say.” It’s not that he doesn’t want to say it, it’s because he can’t say it. You can’t say either “alive” or “dead,” because it is both. This same case also appears in the *Blue Cliff Record*, and I imagine I spoke in some detail about it when delivering a teisho then. On their way back home, Zengen once again cornered his master and pressed him to give an answer, threatening to strike him if he did not. The ancients were truly great! Mind you, it was not the master but the disciple who was speaking up like this! Dōgo then told him, “If you want to hit me, that is up to you, but I will not say.” So Zengen ended up hitting his master. Soon after this, Dōgo himself passed away. Zengen then went to study under the illustrious master Sekisō and related the former exchange with Dōgo, asking for his instruction. But Sekisō said the same thing: “I won’t say alive, I won’t say dead.” Zengen pressed him further: “Why won’t you say it?” Sekisō once again repeats Dōgo’s words, “I won’t say, I won’t say.” And at that moment, Zengen came to enlightenment. Anyone can see from the standpoint of the phenomenal world that the person has died. But the aspect of “not dying” cannot be seen without the eye of kensho. If we ask what the most joyful aspect of kensho is, it is realizing that you can never die. What could be more joyous? There may be some people who want to die, but most people are afraid of dying. But even a suicidal person would no doubt jump back in fright or run away if a pistol were suddenly pointed at his breast. You might assume that a suicidal person would be overjoyed at the sight of that pistol being pointed at him, but that’s evidently not the case. It’s a natural human instinct to fear death, which is no doubt because we instinctively sense that we do not die, that there is no death. Death goes against the truth of our immortality, so that we can never agree to something that denies that fact.

I’ve diverged from my topic. Let us return to the present case where Gantō pays a visit on Tokusan. The part where he stands on the threshold may seem similar to the story of the Buddha just cited, but the content is a bit different. “Is this ordinary, is this holy?” As I mentioned, “this” refers to himself and also refers simultaneously to Tokusan.

Tokusan shouted, “Kaatz!” What is this shout? Divisions between “holy” and “ordinary” belong to the dualistic world of phenomena. It is only in the phenomenal world that there is such a division between “alive” and “dead.” This shout of Tokusan is the complete

manifestation of the essential world. With his mighty shout of “Kaatz!” Tokusan blows away all dualistic concepts of “ordinary and holy” or “alive and dead.” He has fully presented the world of MU, the world of not a single thing.

Gantō made a deep bow. With his bow, he is saying, “Thank you very much!”

As I have mentioned several times already, Tokusan was originally a great scholar of the *Diamond Sutra*, with no equal in all of China. That sutra states that the process by which an ordinary person comes to enlightenment and becomes a Buddha requires a very long process of practice, not to be completed in one or two lifetimes, but rather in terms of thousand or tens of thousands of years. But then Tokusan heard about some “strange Zen sect” in the south of China that was preaching about “directly pointing to Mind, attaining kensho and attaining Buddhahood.” The Zen school was pointing directly to the mind of the person and saying this was our true self, it said it was a matter of grasping our essential nature in immediately becoming a Buddha. It said that this was the matter of an instant, and not something that took thousands of years. Tokusan found such pronouncements most distasteful and resolved to travel to the south to wipe out such heresy. Fuming with indignation, he stuck his commentaries on the *Diamond Sutra* in his pack and set off for the south. Upon arriving, he felt somewhat hungry and thought of getting a bite to eat and a cup of tea. He spied a teahouse on the wayside run by an old woman. Tokusan asked her for a snack of some sort, perhaps a bean cake or the like. The old woman asked Tokusan what he was carrying in his bag. “These books here?” he said. “These are commentaries on the *Diamond Sutra*. Haven’t you ever heard about the famous *Shû-Kongô-Ô*, Shû (Zhou), the famous “King of the Diamond Sutra? That’s me! And no one is my equal when it comes to understanding the *Diamond Sutra*.” This seems to have been his nickname as a famous authority on the *Diamond Sutra*. “Is that so?” the old woman said. “Then I would like to ask you a question. If you can answer it, I’ll treat you to a snack. If not, I won’t even let you buy one!”

“Ask me whatever you like,” Tokusan said. The old woman said, “I hear that it is said in that sutra, ‘The past mind can’t be caught; the present mind can’t be caught; the future mind can’t be caught.’”

The past mind is gone forever. The future mind has not yet come. And the present mind is gone before we can say a word. You might think that the real mind is the present mind, the present moment, and that it can be grasped, but it’s only an instant and then gone, before you can say “now.” Thus, the present mind is also unattainable. This is written in the *Diamond Sutra*. Then the woman continued: “With what mind are you going to eat the cake?” Even that great Diamond Sutra scholar Tokusan was suddenly at a loss for words. The old woman had just said that she would give him a cake for free if he could supply an answer, but no cake at all if he could not. Although the story does not relate whether Tokusan got a cake or not, the fact is that he couldn’t say a word in reply to the old woman’s question. Then he considered the matter. “This old woman doesn’t seem to be just any old grandma. She must be practicing somewhere with a Zen master.” And so he asked the woman if there were any Zen masters in the

neighborhood. She told him that at a slight distance was living the outstanding Zen master Ryûtan Oshô. Tokusan immediately set off to pay a visit on Ryûtan. To make a long story short, Tokusan finally came to great enlightenment upon meeting Ryûtan Oshô. Let me relate the details. Tokusan paid a visit on Ryûtan and questioned until late in the evening, no doubt asking about zazen, about the master's dharma preaching and all matters that he had doubts about. Meanwhile it had grown quite late. Ryûtan said it was about time they retired for the night, and Tokusan no doubt stayed overnight in Ryûtan's temple. Tokusan said goodnight and went outside, only to find it was pitch dark. "It's pitch dark outside," he told Ryûtan upon returning to the room. "Is that so?" said Ryûtan, and lit a candle which he handed to Tokusan. Just as Tokusan was about to take the candle, Ryûtan blew it out with a puff. The entire room was thrown into darkness, and in that instant all of Tokusan's doubts and concepts were blown away. What had happened? We can only say that Tokusan had undergone a process of inner ripening in his inner search for the truth. He had no doubt searched earnestly with everything in him. He somehow realized himself that, although he had studied and read many sutra commentaries, he still had no understanding of the true matter. There must have been a process continuing in his subconscious mind. That process had come to ripening, so that when the candle was blown out, he suddenly realized. You might think you would like to try the same method to come to realization, but unfortunately it won't work. That inner process of collected inner searching is necessary. That was the kind of person Tokusan was. But that same Tokusan evidently had a tendency to stick to the world of enlightenment. The world of enlightenment is just one aspect of the whole, it's only one half. Most people know nothing about the world of enlightenment. But when you realize enlightenment, you clearly realize a world where there is not a single thing, and simultaneously you realize that this is no other than the world of phenomena. I often compare it with my hand. The back of my hand can be considered to be the phenomenal world, while the palm of my hand is the essential world, the world of enlightenment. But they are one and the same hand, so to speak. It seems, however, that Tokusan tended excessively to stick to the world of enlightenment; he was a person who had such a tendency. We see this in today's koan as well, when he suddenly gives out a loud cry of "Kaatz!" thereby producing the world of enlightenment. And as we heard, Gantô made a deep bow in response to that shout.

It appears that someone related these happenings to Tôzan Gohon Daishi. Tôzan had been Gantô's master and knew him well. He also seems to have had some dealings with Tokusan. Examining the present case, we might assume that Tokusan was close to the Rinzai School in his approach, but actually he was closer to the Soto School.

Hearing of this, Tôzan said, "Hardly anyone but Gantô could have accepted it that way." Gantô accepted that cry of "Kaatz!" without resistance and made a bow.

These words of praise by Tôzan later came to Gantô's attention:

Gantō said, "Old Tōzan can't tell between good and bad. At that time, I raised up with one hand and suppressed with the other."

He seems to be hurling invective at Tōzan by saying that he can't tell between good and bad. He says that, when he made a bow at that time, he was uplifting but also pushing down, and that Tōzan evidently doesn't realize that. It's easy enough to see where he was uplifting, but where was he suppressing? All of you should try to come up with a reply to this question. In surveying teishos by other persons on this koan, I find few if any who explain this point with any clarity. If I may express my own view, remember that Tokusan reveals the world of "not one thing," the world of satori with his shout of "Kaatz!" In response, Gantō makes a bow. That is the movement of the world of phenomena. How can I best express it? His bow is something like an "antithesis" in response to the "thesis" of the shout, and in this sense he is "suppressing." Unless we see this point, Gantō's statement is hard to understand. That, at any rate, is my view of things. It might be strange to say that Gantō's bow is an "antithesis" in response to the world of emptiness. Needless to say, his bow is also the complete manifestation of the essence, but that movement is also a movement in the world of phenomena and thus a response to the essential world revealed in Tokusan's shout. Please take time to savor this point.

***On the Verse:***

Foiling the attempt of the oncomer, holding the grip of authority; This line has been interpreted variously. The "attempt of the oncomer" means the action of the person who comes. What I am about to say differs somewhat from the views expressed by Old Man Banshō in his commentary. I see this line as referring to Tokusan. But the "attempt of the oncomer" is actually Gantō when he poses the question, "Is this ordinary or is this holy?" He is full of spirit with his challenge. And then Tokusan blows everything away with his mighty cry of "Kaatz!" thus foiling Gantō's advance. This is expressed in the words "holding the grip of authority." The original Chinese text uses the characters for "scale" and indicates how Tokusan has the measuring standard in his hands for deciding between good and bad. I also see this as referring to Tokusan, who has foiled that assault of Gantō and holds authority. He holds the great dharma; he holds all of Buddhism in his hands.

Things have rules after which they must be performed;

Nations have laws that must not be violated. I consider the first of these two lines as referring to Gantō. For Gantō there is something that must be done at any cost, and he does so in thrusting forth his question of "is this ordinary or is this holy?" He can't help but act in this way. But what is the second line referring to when it speaks about nations having laws that must not be violated? I can't help feeling this line refers to Tokusan with his shout of "Kaatz!" Then we come to the ensuing lines.

The guest reverently brings his gift, and the host becomes proud;

The lord dislikes admonition, and the subordinates flatter (him). What does this mean about the guest reverently bringing a gift? I feel this is referring to Tōzan Gohon Daishi, with his statement, ““Hardly anyone but Gantō could have accepted it that way.”

And the section about “the host becomes proud” refers, in my opinion, to Gantō with his bold statement, “Old Tōzan can't tell between good and bad.”

As for the second of these two lines, if the lord is not that intelligent, the loyal vassal will do what he can, even admonishing, to make sure things go in the right direction. But it says that the lord dislikes being admonished. What does this refer to? The admonishment can be seen as Gantō's challenge of “is this ordinary or is this holy?” And in response, “the lord dislikes admonishment,” which refers to how Tokusan lets out a great cry of “Kaatz!” Then the “subordinates flatter (him),” which refers, in my opinion, to how Gantō unhesitatingly makes a bow. In response to Gantō's question, Tokusan seems to “dislike” it and utters his cry of “Kaatz!” thus effectively cutting that off. And although Gantō could have made his own parry in response to that thrust, he immediately makes a bow. This can be seen as the “flattery” appearing in the verse.

What is the meaning of Gantō's questioning Tokusan?

One raising, one suppressing – observe well his mind and action! Gantō poses his question, “Is this ordinary or is this holy?” The verse urges us to sense his state of consciousness as he poses his question.

The same holds for “one raising, one suppressing” in the ensuing line. We are exhorted to “observe well his mind and action.” As I just mentioned, this is a reference of this act of simultaneously raising and suppressing with his bow. He may seem to be expressing his thanks for the shout with his bow, but we must also see that the “criticism“ of that “Kaatz” expressing the world of emptiness, although “criticism” may not be the best expression. Perhaps “opinion” would be better. The verses of the *Book of Equanimity* have had a reputation since olden times of being difficult to understand, and many differing views have been proposed as to their meaning. What Old Man Banshō writes about the verse to this koan in his commentary is slightly different from what I have just said, but I feel that my own opinions may be somewhat easier to understand, and I have thus made bold to express a differing opinion.