

CASE 30

Daizui's Kalpa Fire



By Yamada Kōun

Instruction:

Annihilating all oppositions, cutting off both heads through sitting:
In order to smash the lump of doubt, how would you need a full phrase?
The Capital Chang-an is not even an inch away,
The mountain Tai weighs only three pounds.
Just tell me, relying on what command do you say something like that?

Case:

A monk asked Daizui, "When the great kalpa fire bursts out, the whole universe¹ will be destroyed. I wonder if IT will also be destroyed or not." Daizui said, "Destroyed." The monk said, "If so, will IT be gone with the other²?" Daizui said, "Gone with the other."

A monk asked Ryūsai, "When the great kalpa fire bursts out, the whole universe will be destroyed. I wonder if IT will also be destroyed or not." Ryūsai said, "Not destroyed." The monk said, "Why is it not destroyed?" Ryūsai said, "Because it is the same as the whole universe."

Verse:

Destroyed -- not destroyed:
The great universe – gone with the other?
In the phrases lies no activity of hook or chain.
Many legs are caught by entangling vines.
Understand? -- not understand?
It's a matter with utmost clarity – why are they being so extremely polite?
Those who know the heart need not bring up the matter to negotiate about it;
If you insist on selling or buying at my store, you are [already] a poor loser.

¹ Literally: "triple-thousand great one-thousand worlds."

² The word "the other" means "the universe."

On the Instruction:

This is our last zazenkaï this year (1980) and this year will be ending with my teisho on Case 30 of the *Book of Equanimity*. Let me first introduce the names of the persons appearing in today's case. Daizui gets his name from Mt. Daizui, which is located in Ekishû in Sichuan Province, his place of residence. His full name was Daizui Honshin Zenji. Prior to that he resided in the temple Xiyuan (Seiin, alternately known as Changxi-Yuan <Chôkei-In>), in Fuzhou. It appears that Daizui in his younger years was more associated with the Soto School, practicing under such masters as Yakusan Zenji, Ungan Zenji, Dôgo Zenji and Sôzan Zenji. Following that he practiced under Rinzai masters, finally inheriting the Dharma of Chôkei Dai-an Zenji, himself a dharma-successor of Hyakujô Ekai Zenji. He was also second in succession to Isan Zenji. As you might know, this was Isan Reiyû Zenji. That means he was in the Rinzai line of succession that included Nangaku, Baso, Hyakujô and Daian. He died in 909 AD, which was about 1006 years ago. His successor, Ryûsai Zenji, is the Shuzanshu who appears in Case 12 of this collection. He lived on Mt. Ryûsai and was also known as Shôshu Zenji.

The Instruction, as I always mention, speaks of the fundamental meaning of the dharma while focusing on the Main Case. Let's look at it now:

Annihilating all oppositions, cutting off both heads through sitting: The essence of Buddhism, as you know, is the element of "oneness." It's a question of whether you have clearly grasped the world of oneness. The world of everyday thinking is generally the world of duality. The most fundamental form of duality is the division into subject and object. There is the one who sees and that which is seen, it is the world of dualistic opposition. This dualistic opposition is the source of all sorts of concepts involving a standoff between human beings. The basis is this division into subject and object, but also includes other forms of dualistic opposition such as self and others, delusion and enlightenment, profane and holy, positive and negative, gain and loss, long and short, light and heavy, big and small. It's a matter of annihilating those oppositions, transcending them. "Cutting off both heads*," means the two heads of subject and object, the one who sees and the object of seeing. You have to cut them off and make a direct leap into the world of oneness. That is the purpose of zazen.

In order to smash the lump of doubt, how would you need a full phrase? The "lump of doubt" means all the forms of doubting in your head, all the collected "trash" of your own thoughts. This refers to intellectual doubts, and you have to smash that lump of doubt. And, as the Instruction says, "how would you need a full phrase?" Why do you need any words? It's enough to look inside yourself and then suddenly you will realize. What then?

The Capital Chang-an is not even an inch away, Chang-an was the Chinese capital in the Tang Dynasty. During the reign of the Emperor Gaozu of Han, the capital formerly known as Xianyang had its name changed to Chang-an, which is present-day Xian.

When Prime Minister Ohira³ recently visited China, the newspapers said he also visited Xian. There is also the saying that appears frequently in Zen texts: *The Great Way goes to Chang'an*. This would be like Tokyo in Japan. But what is this line saying? It means our true self. You can think of it as meaning Mu. You might think that Tokyo is far away from here in terms of kilometers, but lo and behold, Tokyo is right here. Jesus Christ was well acquainted with this fact and said things like “the Kingdom of God is at hand.” You might think it means that the Kingdom of God is gradually approaching, but that is not the real meaning. It means it is “right here!” This is saying the same thing in the Instruction: The capital Chang-an is not even an inch away.

The mountain Tai weighs only three pounds. Mt. Tai is located in Shandong Province. Usually the word “Tai” is written with the character meaning “peace”, but here a character is used having the same sound but having the meaning of “large” or “thick.” Mt. Tai is no doubt heavy beyond weighing. For example, if someone were to ask you, “How heavy is Mt. Fuji?” you would be stumped for an answer, at least in terms of phenomena. But here is the Instruction saying that Mt. Tai weighs only three pounds, which means you could pick it up with one hand! This is another expression of “annihilating all oppositions.” It transcends all matters of heavy or light. But if you say things like “transcending heaviness,” it becomes very abstract, so instead the author uses very concrete words: The mountain Tai weighs only three pounds. Actually, it has no weight at all! Seen from the viewpoint of the essential world, there is no weight, but saying it that way “stinks” of satori, and to avoid that, the author uses the expression found in the Instruction. In other words, we have to transcend the world of dualistic opposites, such as heavy and light. This is the purpose of Zen, and unless you do, you cannot experience true peace.

Just tell me, relying on what command do you say something like that? “Command” here means fact. On what fact do you base that statement you make so bold to make? Where are your grounds for saying it? I will give an example now, so look carefully. This is his way of summoning up the Main Case.

On the Case:

A monk asked Daizui, “When the great kalpa fire bursts out, the whole universe will be destroyed. I wonder if IT will also be destroyed or not.” As some of you probably know, this koan also appears as Case 29 in the *Blue Cliff Record*. In that other collection, however, only half of the koan appears and ends with Daizui’s words “Gone with the other.” In this version the koan continues with a further exchange. The *Book of Equanimity* has this element of careful precision. And yet, I myself feel that the version in the *Blue Cliff Record*, lacking the second part, is actually superior. The reason for my saying so is that the student should actually come to an understanding of the koan in personal experience and not

³ **Masayoshi Ohira** was a Japanese politician and the 68th and 69th Prime Minister of Japan from December 7, 1978 to June 12, 1980.

have everything explained. When everything is explained so carefully as in this version of the koan, it will be that more difficult to grasp the real thing directly. The best way would be to present just the first half and have the student work out the rest on her own through fervent inquiry in Zen practice. In the end they're talking about the same thing. This reference to the great kalpa fire and the whole universe actually comes from the cosmology of ancient India. The universe is made in this form and maintains that form for a certain time, after which it returns again to nothingness. This state of nothingness continues for a time, after which the world of phenomena develops and extends out once again in an endless cycle. What's more, it takes an extraordinarily long time for the universe to come into existence. That immeasurably long time is known in Sanskrit as a kalpa. I have explained the meaning of kalpa several times already in other teishos, but for the sake of newcomers let me offer a brief explanation here again. According to descriptions in Chinese texts, a kalpa is the time it takes for a block of stone measuring forty meters on each side to be leveled to the ground when an angel descends from heaven once every hundred years and brushes the stone with her feather cape once. As you can see, it's an unimaginably long time period! This is the time required for the universe to come into existence. This is known in Chinese as *jōgō* (development kalpa). The completed universe, that is, the phenomenal world, will eventually be destroyed and disappear. This is known as *ekō* (destruction kalpa). This also takes an immeasurably long time. And then it completely disappears and there is nothing. This period when there is nothing at all is known as *kūkō* (emptiness kalpa). This, too, is an unimaginably long period of time. The ancient Indians explained the universe in terms of such an interminable cycle of appearance, disappearance and emptiness, followed again by appearance. The Indians were really something when it came to imagining such things! For people like us, busy everyday going to the company and working, there's no time to think about such matters. I've never been to India but I imagine that life proceeds there at a generally more leisurely pace. Of course, there are also places where many people suffer from extreme poverty and are starving. But when people at least have enough to eat, there are evidently people there who, instead of running around working, consider such matters as the cosmos in all leisure. At any rate, Indian cosmology says the universe goes through these four stages in a constant cycle.

The "great kalpa fire" referred to here means the time when the universe is destroyed and returns to nothing. It's the great kalpa fire of destruction at the end of the universe. The Buddhist text known as the *Abhidharmakosa* (jap. *Gusharon*) contains several descriptions of the destruction of the universe, although I must admit that I haven't read it myself. At any rate, the monk in today's koan is asking about the time when the universe burns up in the great kalpa fire, after which a great wind blows and sweeps away all the ashes from the fire. Then comes a great flood to wash everything clean, after which we enter into the "emptiness kalpa" where there is nothing at all. This is evidently how things are described in the *Abhidharmakosa*. This is known as the "description of the three calamities" (fire, wind, water). The "kalpa fire" in the koan is the fire calamity. As the footnote mentions, the word translated

here as “the whole universe” means “large thousand” in the original Chinese and means three-thousand large worlds. What we usually assume to be our own solar system, if multiplied by one thousand, would be a “small thousand worlds.” If that “small thousand worlds” were itself multiplied by a thousand, you would have a “middle thousand worlds.” And if that “middle thousand worlds” were itself multiplied by a thousand, you would have a “large thousand worlds.” For our sake we can simply consider it to be the entire universe. We assume that the entire universe is destroyed. Then the monk asks, “I wonder if IT will also be destroyed or not.” What is IT? Briefly put, it is your true self. The monk is asking, “What will happen to me?” It’s something we’d all like to know! It’s the equivalent of asking what happens to us when we die. We’d all like to know. The other day I attended a gathering of relatives. Among the guests was a senior associate of my cousin who was a member of management at a major Japanese bank and who is now retired. He must be about 85 years old now. He graduated from Waseda University and is a very capable person. This person confided to me, “You know, Kyōzō, when I think about dying these days I’m scared out of my wits.” He said that, if it were in his power, he’d like to drop over dead in an instant. I could well understand his feelings. After all, it’s certainly no easy task to be able to calmly look death straight in the eyes as it slowly but surely approaches. Upon hearing him say this, I thought to myself, “Although he was such a success in society, he’s terrified of death in the end.” But at least he’s very honest. Most people wouldn’t say it like that, even though they feel the same way. Try asking yourself. If you bring up the subject of dying, most people laugh. I don’t know why that’s the usual reaction to such a comment, but it is. Actually, it should be a very serious question and a problem for us all. To say you’re afraid of dying is honestly expressing your feelings. I don’t know if wanting to drop dead in a matter of seconds is a good thing or not, but there’s the problem. Persons who have practiced zazen are familiar with what we call the true self or Mu. And people who have had an experience of kensho should know it that much more clearly. In other words, you should know that you are empty. What happens, then, to that self, which is empty? Does that also disappear without a trace? This was the question of the monk in this koan.

In reply, Daizui says, “Destroyed,” thus delivering a crushing blow. In reply the monk asks, “If so, will IT be gone with the other?” The “other” probably means the objective world. He is asking if he will be destroyed with the thousand great worlds. Daizui says, “Gone with the other,” thus passing judgment. I believe it was in his teisho to this case as it appears in the *Blue Cliff Record* that Yasutani Roshi says that the monk (and all of us) must be in a state of mind to be able to accept these words of Daizui with total gratitude.

Actually it would have been enough if the koan ended here. Why should the monk feel grateful on hearing this answer? This forms the second part of the koan in the version found here in the *Book of Equanimity*. This time the monk poses the same question to Ryūsai Zenji.

A monk asked Ryūsai, “When the great kalpa fire bursts out, the whole universe will be destroyed. I wonder if IT will also be destroyed or not.” Ryūsai

said, "Not destroyed." The monk had heard the opposite from Daizui, so he poses a further question:

The monk said, "Why is it not destroyed?" Ryūsai said, "Because it is the same as the whole universe." The monk is still viewing himself (which is actually empty) and the universe as two different things. That will not do. Ryūsai is telling him that they are one. It's important to grasp this fact expressed here, not intellectually but in actual experience. I first worked on this koan with Hanamoto Kanzui Rōshi of Muga-Sōzan Temple in Kamakura's Ofuna district. As my presentation of the koan I cried out "Ei!!" in a loud voice, which was a presentation of Daizui's "Destroyed" (Japanese: E). You must realize that with that single shout of "Ei!!" everything is destroyed. You must be able to present this in your way in the dokusan room. I actually shouldn't be "exposing the trick" in this way. Afterward, as we see in the koan, the monk asks Ryūsai the same question and receives the reply "because it is the same as the whole universe." He tells us that to think it is two different things is to miss the point. There are several koans of this sort in the Zen records. For example, there is Jōshū's Mu. The monk asks, "Does a dog have Buddha-nature or not?" And Jōshū replies, "Mu" (which means "not having"). But then the same monk (or perhaps another monk) asks the same question and this time Jōshū says "U" (which means "having"). Whether it's Mu and U, or destroyed (e) and not destroyed (fue), they agree perfectly with each other. In other words, when he says "destroyed" (e), there is only that "destroyed" only that "e" in the whole universe. He is viewing the world of not a single thing. When the other one says, "not destroyed" (fue), there is not a trace of "destroyed" (e). He is viewing the creation of the universe. All phenomena emerge from there. Although it is "not destroyed" (fue), it is simultaneously empty. You have to be able to see this clearly. We have the much the same thing in Case 61 of the *Blue Cliff Record*:

Fuketsu, giving instruction, said, "If one raises a speck of dust, the house and the nation prosper. If one does not raise a speck of dust, they perish."

If you do not raise a speck of dust, the entire universe perishes. But the first part says that, if you raise a speck of dust, house and nation prosper. Actually I feel they're talking about the same thing. Sometimes you say, "this very mind is Buddha." Another time you say, "not mind, not Buddha." It's a matter of looking at the same thing from the point of the world of phenomena or from the standpoint of the essential world. But actually they are one. If you have clearly grasped how they are completely one, it makes no difference whether you say "destroyed" or "not destroyed." When you say, "destroyed" (e), it exhausts the entire universe. When you say, "not destroyed" (fue), it exhausts the entire universe. Please take time to savor this.

Case 23 of the *Gateless Gate* is entitled "Think Neither Good Nor Evil." The Verse to that koan says, "Even if the world is destroyed, it is indestructible." This is the aspect of "not destroyed" (fue). On the other hand, it is also saying "destroyed" (e). I always tell students who are working on this particular case in the *Gateless Gate* that "destroyed" is no other than "not

destroyed.” On the other hand, there is Case 29 in the *Blue Cliff Record*, where Daizui says “destroyed” (e), and I ask students about this seeming difference. This point must be made clear. To be frank, you could say that both are true, but both are just half of the picture. From an even higher perspective you could say that “destroyed” is the whole and “not destroyed” is the whole. If you have clearly grasped the world of oneness, neither of them is wrong, both are right. The Verse to the above-mentioned case in the *Blue Cliff Record* says, “In the light of the kalpa fire a question is raised.” This is referring to the monk posing his question: “When the great kalpa fire bursts out, the whole universe will be destroyed. I wonder if IT will also be destroyed or not.”

The Verse as found in the *Blue Cliff Record* continues: “The patchrobed monk is still lingering within the double barrier.”

This refers to being caught in the duality of “destroyed and not destroyed” of subject and object like a scale swaying to and fro.

“How touching—for a single phrase, “going along with that.”

Daizui said, “Gone with the other.” The author of the verse finds that most interesting and appealing.

“Intently he traveled out and back along for ten thousand miles.”

Since the monk did not clearly understand Daizui’s statement of “gone with the other,” he is still wavering inwardly. This is what this line of the verse is expressing. This statement has its origin in the fact that the monk went first to Daizui with his question but did not come to real clarity, after which he went to Ryūsai and still did not come to real clarity. It is said that he then went to Tōsu Daidō Oshō. Tōsu asked him where he came from and the monk said, “I have come from Daizui.”

“What did Daizui preach to you?”

The monk then related what had transpired.

Upon hearing this, Tōsu, according to the records, changed his robe, lit incense and prostrated himself three times in Daizui’s direction, saying that Daizui was an “old Buddha.” He then told the monk not to waste any time but to hurry on back to Daizui. Earnest monk that he was, he nodded in assent and traveled back to Daizui. This is the origin of this line from the verse. But upon returning, he found that Daizui had already passed away. This is how the story is related, at any rate, in the *Blue Cliff Record*. Take the time to savor this story and the verse.

On the Verse:

Destroyed -- not destroyed:

The great universe – gone with the other? The answers of the two masters (Daizui’s “destroyed” and Ryūsai’s “not destroyed”) are brought together here in this line of the Verse.

The words “gone with the other” express the world of emptiness. The words “because it is the same as the whole universe” express the world of phenomena.

In the phrases lies no activity of hook or chain. In other words, there is no trick or ploy behind the words just cited above. When you say “destroyed” (e), that “destroyed” exhausts the entire universe.

And when you say “not destroyed” (fue), that “not destroyed” exhausts the entire universe.

Many legs are caught by entangling vines. The “legs” are a reference to traveling on pilgrimage to visit illustrious Zen masters and engage in Zen exchanges with them. The poet says that many monks who go on pilgrimage in that way get caught in the entangling vines of concepts and thoughts, thus losing their true freedom.

Understand? -- not understand?

It's a matter with utmost clarity – why are they being so extremely polite? Isn't it already completely clear? When there is “destroyed,” that is everything. When it is “not destroyed,” that is everything. Why are you still chattering away about it?

Those who know the heart need not bring up the matter to negotiate about it. To “know the heart” (chishin) is the same as the Japanese expression *chi-in* (literally, to “know the sound”), which means being intimate with the matter. There is the expression *chi-in no tomo*, which means two friends on intimate terms who know each other’s feelings intimately.

To “bring up the matter and negotiate about it” means to bring up a koan or some Zen saying and engage in long discussions about it. If you truly know in your heart, there is no need for such a thing, the poet tells us. But many are those who bring up this matter of “destroyed or not destroyed” and engage in interminable discussions about it.

If you insist on selling or buying at my store, you are [already] a poor loser. The poet tells us that there is no haggling at his store. It is always the set price on the price tag, so to speak. He is saying that even Daizui and Ryūsai cannot match his store. This is Wanshi Zenji, the author of the verse, speaking his mind. “At my place,” he says, “there is only the world of oneness. There is no duality.” In other words, the true fact is always one. If you fall into duality, you lose the true fact.

Since you have all taken up the practice of Zen, I would like all of you to also grasp the world where there is “no haggling” in the sense of no duality.

Dōgen Zenji says when there is life (shō) it exhausts the entire universe. When there is death (shi) it exhausts the entire universe. “In birth there is undivided activity of all things, and in death there is undivided activity of all things.” If he put it explanatory terms, we can say that, even though you did, it is not that you really cease to exist. There is definitely another

world. But we find this quite difficult to believe. And we toil away in this world alone. But what about life after death? You should at least have in mind that our true life continues on forever. We never die. If we were to die, then no matter how many good things we did in this world, it would not have much meaning. So it's important to accumulate virtue.