

CASE 48

Vimalakīrti's "Not-Two"



By Yamada Kōun

Instruction:

Even if one's action is so free in all directions,
There's a spot where one cannot start a thing at all;
Even if one's eloquence knows no hindrance,
There is a time one cannot even open up the mouth.
Just as Ryūge, a man of no hand, hit with a hand,
Kasan made a tongueless person speak.
Who is the one who can place oneself in the Middle Way?

Case:

Vimalakīrti asked Manjusri, "What does it mean that the Bodhisattva enters the Dharma-gate of Not-Two?" Manjusri said, "I see it like this: In all phenomena, there are neither words nor explanations, neither presentations nor knowledge; it is beyond all questions and answers. That is what I understand with 'to enter the Dharma-gate of Not-Two'."

Then Manjusri asked Vimalakīrti, "All of us have finished giving our explanations. Now you should give your explanation. What does it mean that the Bodhisattva enters the Dharma-gate of Not-Two?"

Vimalakīrti remained silent.

Verse:

Manjusri asks about the illness of the Old Bina;
The gate of Not-Two opens, and one sees the adepts.
A rugged stone on the surface, a pure stone inside—who could appreciate it?
Forgetting and losing what is before and after oneself—do not lament.
Humbly presenting the gem that looked like a stone
The man had his foot tendons cut off in the yard of So;
The snake, once wounded,
Gives thanks with a shining gem in the castle of Sui.
Stop checking, it has no flaws whatsoever:
When the vulgar mind is all gone, it can be the real thing a little.

On the Case:

Vimalakīrti was a layman and not a monk. But in terms of his satori realization he was a match for Shakyamuni Buddha. For this reason, it is often said that Vimalakīrti is

actually a Buddha. In a former world he was known as Mudōbutsu or Immovable Buddha, as he was the Buddha who came to great enlightenment as Immovable Buddha. That Buddha took the form of a layman to aid Shakyamuni Buddha in his teaching activities. Another name given to Vimalakirti is Jōmyō (Pure Name). He was married and had one son and one daughter. His wife's name was Golden Princess. His son's name was Good Thought and his daughter's name was Moonlike Beauty. It is said that, in a former world, he was the Buddha known as Immovable Buddha in the kingdom known as Wondrous Happiness. He was a Buddha who had practiced and realized great enlightenment, after which he became Golden Chestnut Tathagata, which was another name for Layman Vimalakirti.

Manjusri is the wooden figure on the right side of our altar here in San-un Zendo. You can consider the Main Case to be a drama or play. The main role is Vimalakirti. If we were to compare it to a Japanese Noh play, we could say Vimalakirti has the main role or *shite*, while Manjusri has the auxiliary role or *waki*. Bodhisattva Manjusri, although he appears as a bodhisattva, is actually a Buddha. The same holds for Kanzeon, also known as Bodhisattva Kannon. There are some spellings of Manjusri's name using the Chinese characters for Manchuria (Japanese pronunciation: Manshū) to write the first part of his name

Manjusri, too, was also a person who had already attained Buddhahood in the distant past. He was also known as Dragon Pearl August Buddha. Another was Fuken Nyorai (All-Embracing View Tathagata), who becomes a Buddha in the future. At the present time, there is already a Pure Land within the range of the teaching activities of the Bodhisattva Manjusri, which is known as the World of Eternal Happiness. We also speak in terms of the World of Paradise. This world we are living in is known as *shaba*, or the world of desire. The range of teaching activities of Shakyamuni Buddha and the range of teaching activities of Amida Buddha is known as Paradise (Japanese: Gokuraku). The range of teaching activities of the Bodhisattva Manjusri is known the World of Eternal Happiness (Japanese: Jōki). This might seem a bit troublesome, but Manjusri's actual name was Kanki Manshaku Hōbutsu, which means he was a Buddha who took the form of a bodhisattva to assist in the teaching activities of Shakyamuni Buddha. This is written in the sutras. It's enough to know just the general outline and not necessary to memorize the individual names. In other words, both Vimalakirti and Manjusri were Buddhas who had already come to great enlightenment. However, in order to assist in the teaching activities of Shakyamuni Buddha to save all beings, one of them took the form of the layman Vimalakirti and one of them took the form of the Bodhisattva Manjusri. In the text known as the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra*, Vimalakirti has taken ill. He was not actually ill, but feigning illness. Shakyamuni Buddha, upon hearing that Vimalakirti was ill, told the others to go and pay a sick call on him. But one by one, they all refused, saying that they were no match for someone like Vimalakirti. They each related how on former occasions, Vimalakirti had defeated them roundly in dharma combat. They all said they had no chance against him. One by one they politely refused, on up to the Bodhisattva Kannon. Finally Buddha ordered Manjusri to visit Vimalakirti. At first Manjusri refused but then deferred to the Buddha's insisting on it. He took several people along with him to pay a sick call. Those various persons posed questions to Vimalakirti one by one and received all manner of answers. Finally Manjusri posed a question. That is actually the content of today's koan which is entitled, "Vimalakirti's Not Two." "Not Two" means no duality, which means it is one. It is the dharma-gate to enter the world of oneness. That is the question posed here. According to commentaries on this koan, to speak even of "one" is not enough. For if you speak of one or oneness, you already enter into the concept of oneness as opposed to duality. It is actually the world that transcends oneness or duality. That is the dharma of the Bodhisattva's entering non-duality. It is the world of the Bodhisattva that transcends one or two. This is the import of the question and that is the exchange between Vimalakirti and Manjusri.

Vimalakirti asked Manjusri, "What does it mean that the Bodhisattva enters the Dharma-gate of Not-Two?" He is asking what sort of world that could be.

Manjusri said, "I see it like this: In all phenomena, there are neither

words nor explanations, neither presentations nor knowledge; it is beyond all questions and answers. That is what I understand with 'to enter the Dharma-gate of Not-Two'." Manjusri says it transcends all question and answers, so you can't utter a word in explanation. Even for a most eloquent person like Manjusri, "there is a time one cannot even open up the mouth" to quote a line from the Instruction. This is what this is getting at here. In this case too, there have been many commentaries. Old Man Banshō, one of the co-authors of this collection, seems to be heckling in his short comments. He seems to be making fun of what Manjusri has said. He says, "How thick is the skin on his face?!" (Cleary). Why does he say that? Remember Manjusri's statement: "In all phenomena, there are neither words nor explanations, neither presentations nor knowledge; it is beyond all questions and answers." Isn't precisely that a case of preaching, Old Man Bashō seems to say. Aren't you preaching it in saying that there are neither words nor explanations? What a cheeky fellow you are, Manjusri! This is his comment on Manjusri's statement.

Then Manjusri asked Vimalakirti, "All of us have finished giving our explanations. Now you should give your explanation. What does it mean that the Bodhisattva enters the Dharma-gate of Not-Two?"

Vimalakirti remained silent. This is a very famous scene in the koans. He just sits there in silence. Some commentators have said that his silence is like thunder. In the version of the story as found in the *Vimalakirti Sutra* it says that he was silent without saying a word. And in that version, Manjusri then says, "Excellent, excellent; can there be true initiation into the non-dual Dharma until words and speech are no longer written or spoken?" He praises Vimalakirti, saying that this is truly the Dharma-gate of Not-Two. As I just mentioned, one commentator has said that Vimalakirti's silence is like thunder. He just sat there in silence, and that silence reverberates throughout the entire universe. This is a most interesting koan.

On the Verse:

Manjusri asks about the illness of the Old Bina; The words "Old Bina" come from the name of the castle where Vimalakirti resided and in this case the words Old Bina mean Vimalakirti himself. We often have cases of Zen masters taking the name of the place where they resided. Manjusri paid a sick call on Vimalakirti.

The gate of Not-Two opens, and one sees the adepts. Here it says that the gate of Not-Two opens, although usually such a gate cannot open. Adepts (sakke) means persons of outstanding Zen ability. It is only such persons who can open up this gate. The gate of Not-Two is completely revealed in his sitting in silence. The verse says that Vimalakirti is truly an adept in that sense, with wonderful ability. Some commentators say that this line is also referring to Manjusri's statement "in all phenomena, there are neither words nor explanations, neither presentations nor knowledge; it is beyond all questions and answers." I, however, do not feel that way. It was in this silence that the gate of Not-Two opened. Those with eyes to see will realize on the spot. That sitting is right smack in the middle of the world of Not-Two.

A rugged stone on the surface, a pure stone inside—who could appreciate it? There is an old story behind this next line of the verse. The stone referred to here is known as "min" in Chinese and was considered the second most precious stone in China after the stone known as "gyoku." The surface might look like such a "min" stone of the second grade of quality. Seen from the surface, it might not appear to be a "gyoku," or finest stone. This is referring to Vimalakirti's silence. In the *Book of Rites*, an ancient Confucian classic in China, there is reportedly the following passage: "The gentlemen prizes the finest jewel (gyoku) and disparages the second-class jewel (min)." The finest jewel (gyoku) is truly pure. The second-class jewel (min) is slightly inferior to that. For this line, too, there have been many commentaries. In Hebei Province is the river known as Xiangshui (literally, fragrant waters). Many such "min" stones could evidently be found there, although I don't

know if that's the case nowadays. To return to the line of the verse, although it is a rugged stone on the surface, it is a pure stone inside. Who could appreciate it? Who would be able to fathom its true worth? All of us are engaged in appreciating it and finding it wonderful. This is no other than Vimalakirti's silence. Some people might think he is silent because he is at a loss for words, but that is definitely not the case. His silence is the complete manifestation. That is why it is "a pure stone inside," even though it might seem like a rugged stone from the surface. The poet is telling all those with eyes to see to have a look.

Forgetting and losing what is before and after oneself—do not lament. This means forgetting what came before and what comes after. It is referring to that silence. At a loss for how to respond to this silence, we forget and lose what is before and after ourselves. But we should not lament and assume that he was at a loss for words. It was not a case of his not knowing what to say, so don't worry about it.

Humbly presenting the gem that looked like a stone

The man had his foot tendons cut off in the yard of So; These lines also have an old story as their source. The *Book of Serenity* is filled with such old stories and references to old legends, which makes it most troublesome to deliver teishos on them, because you have to explain each of them if people are going to understand.

This story originally appears in the ancient Chinese philosophical work *Han-feizi*. During the period of the kingdom of So (Chinese: Chu) there lived a man named Benka who found a stone, which upon polishing could become a precious jewel. The gem looked like an ordinary stone because it had not yet been polished. Knowing, however, that it was a precious stone, Benka presented it to King Rei. Among the royal retainers was a man well-versed in precious stones and the king showed the stone to this other man. That man said it was nothing more than an ordinary stone. Incensed, the king ordered guards to cut the tendons of Benka's right leg as punishment. Benka then wept because people did not have the eyes to see the true worth of the stone. King Rei was succeeded by King Bu. The "yard of So" is a reference to the kingdom of So. (I have left out this lengthy discussion about the meaning of certain Chinese characters. Paul).

This is referring to the silence of Vimalakirti. Although it might not seem like much when seen from the outside, they are unaware that upon polishing it, a most precious jewel will result. At any rate, upon King Bun's ascension to the throne, Benka had lost any desire to present the jewel to him, having been treated so terribly by the king's forerunner. Word got to the king that a certain man had been found crying near Mt. Kei, the place where he had found the jewel. Upon inquiring about why the man was crying, the king discovered that it was not because he had had his tendon cut by the former ruler. It was because nobody recognized the true worth of the precious jewel. The king then decided to have the jewel polished, upon which a most precious jewel resulted. Although it might not seem like much at first glance, it turns out to be quite something. In like manner, although Vimalakirti's sitting there in silence might not seem like much at first glance, much like Benka in the verse, that is not the case.

The snake, once wounded,

Gives thanks with a shining gem in the castle of Sui. This line is also based on a story, which this time originates in the *Book of History*, another Confucian classic. Here is how the story is related in the commentary on this line:

According to the Historical Records, as Shu Yuanzhang, Marquis of Sui, was going to a feast, he saw a snake that had been cut and was dying. He washed and rubbed it with water, then applied a wonder drug and left. Suddenly one night a light appeared in the yard; thinking it was a robber, he took a sword and looked--then he saw a snake holding a jewel in its mouth going along the ground. He realized it was the snake's recompense to him. (Cleary)

This is like the former line in which those persons who have eyes to see will see the true worth of things.

Stop checking, it has no flaws whatsoever:

When the vulgar mind is all gone, it can be the real thing a little. There is

no need for us to check if it is the real thing or not. This is referring to Vimalakirti's silence. As it says here, it has no flaws whatsoever.

The "vulgar mind" in the final line could be a reference to Vimalakirti, who was a layman, and thus "profane." Here the words "vulgar mind" mean the usual dualistic way of seeing things. We all tend to see things dualistically; we have such habits of mind. But in the case of Vimalakirti such habits are completely lacking. When it says, "it can be the real thing a little," it might seem to only be giving faint praise. Although one might assume that Vimalakirti, as a layperson, might have the "vulgar mind" of seeing things dualistically, such dualism is completely gone in his case. And because of that, "it can be the real thing a little." Zen doesn't like to give a full score. In one sense this is a most difficult koan. I repeat the words: Vimalakirti's silence is like thunder. Yasutani Roshi tells us, "Just look and see!"