

CASE 72

*Chûyû's "Monkey"*

By Yamada Kôun



*Instruction:*

Across the river a battle of wisdom: hiding the soldiers, laying an ambush. Facing each other, they fight with the pointed spears and sharpest swords.

This is why the patch-robed monks value total activities and great functions.

Starting slowly, changing briskly – I will try to gush it all out. Look!

*Case:*

Kyôzan asked Chûyû, "What does buddha-nature mean?" Chûyû said, "I will explain it for you by allegory. Suppose there is a room with six windows. Inside there is a monkey. Outside, someone shouts, 'Monkey! monkey!' It immediately responds. If someone calls, 'Monkey!' through any of the windows, it responds just the same. It is just like that." Kyôzan said, "How about when the monkey is asleep?" Chûyû descended from his Zen seat, grasped Kyôzan and said, "O monkey, monkey, there you are!"

*Verse:*

Sleeping as if frozen in a snow-covered house; the year is ending.

The quiet gate with ivy and wisteria – it does not open.

Trees in the garden, withered in the winter, perceive the change of the climate.

The spring wind blows away the ashes in the wooden pipe.

*On the Case:*

Today's koan consists of a mondo (question and answer) between Kyôzan and Chûyû. Kyôzan is known as one of the cofounders of the Igyô School of Zen, the other being Isan. There were originally five schools of Zen: Soto, Rinzai, Unmon, Hôgen and Igyô. Although Isan and Kyôzan both have the same character "san" (mountain) as the second character of their names,

in Isan's case it remains "san" while in Kyôzan's case the same character becomes a voiced consonant ("zan"). Chûyû was in the relation of a great uncle in the dharma to Kyôzan. From the lineage of the Sixth Patriarch Huineng (Enô) emerged great personages such as Nangaku Ejô Zenji and Seigen Gyôshi Zenji. From Nangaku's lineage emerged the Rinzai School, and from Seigen's lineage emerged the Soto School. That means that both Kyôzan and Chûyû were of the Rinzai lineage. The Sixth Patriarch Enô Zenji, Nangaku Ejô Zenji and Baso Dôitsu Zenji were all famous masters. Baso had many dharma successors, some ninety in all, it is said. Among those successors was Hyakujô Ekai Zenji who counted Chûyû Kyôon among his disciples. Hyakujô's successors included Isan, who was followed by Kyôzan. This is the reason for my saying that Chûyû was like a great uncle in the dharma as far as Kyôzan was concerned.

It might be easier to understand if I speak about the Main Case first. At the time of this exchange, Kyôzan was supposedly only thirteen years old, writes Yasutani Roshi in his comments to this koan. I examined a number of sources and discovered in one book that he became a monk at the age of seventeen. That would probably mean that he received the precepts as a monk, as is the case for modern monks. The *Ten Grave Precepts* (jûjûkinkai), which we receive in the Gojukai Ceremony, are the same as those received by the monks. But there are also other precepts that only monks receive. That means Kyôzan too received additional precepts after becoming a monk. On his way back from the ceremony, he paid a visit on Chûyû to express his thanks. Thus, I would imagine that Kyôzan was about seventeen years old at the time of this exchange.

Chûyû was an interesting fellow who would act like a baby, patting his head and babbling baby talk if a monk came to visit. But this was his way of presenting the essential world, as I'm sure you're aware. Kyôzan came to pay a visit on him to express his thanks for his being able to receive the precepts. This is known as *shakai* or "giving thanks for the precepts."

When Kyôzan came to pay his thanks, Chûyû said, "Where did you receive this samadhi?" With this question he was asking where Kyôzan had learned this ceremony of giving thanks. In response, Kyôzan said, "I learned it from Inshi of Sôkei." Sôkei means the dharma line of succession of the Sixth Patriarch Enô. This is true because Kyôzan was a disciple of Isan in the lineage that included the Sixth Patriarch, Nangaku, Baso, Hyakujô and Isan. This is what he meant with his reply. Then Chûyû said, "Are you saying that Sôkei used this samadhi to greet people?" He is actually asking if the Sixth Patriarch used that to bring people to enlightenment. Then Kyôzan said, "When he received the 'Overnight Guest,' he used this samadhi." The "Overnight Guest" means Yôka Daishi, the author of the *Shôdôka*. Then he posed his own question: "Master, where did you learn this samadhi?" Kyôzan is referring to Chûyû's acting like a baby, cooing and babbling. In reply, Chûyû said, "I learned this samadhi at Great Teacher Ba's." It is at this point that the exchange in today's koan begins.

Kyôzan asked Chûyû, "What does buddha-nature mean?" Kyôzan is actually asking, "What is buddha-nature?" Everyone talks about Buddha-nature, but what is actually

Buddha-nature?

Chûyû said, "I will explain it for you by allegory. Suppose there is a room with six windows. Inside there is a monkey. Outside, someone shouts, 'Monkey! monkey!' It immediately responds. If someone calls, 'Monkey!' through any of the windows, it responds just the same. It is just like that." This is Chûyû's way of explaining Buddha-nature. What does Kyôzan say in reply?

Kyôzan said, "How about when the monkey is asleep?" Kyôzan says in effect, "Yes, I understand what you're saying. But what about when the monkey is sleeping?"

Up to then Chûyû had been imagining that Kyôzan was not very advanced in his practice, but when he hears this question, he realizes that Kyôzan is quite a sharp cookie. Because true Buddha-nature does not move, it cannot come to a window. What are the six windows? These are our six senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, sensation and will. Here these six senses are compared to six windows. We can consider, for example, the eyes to be one window. It is not the eyes that see but rather that essential monkey inside. This is known as essential nature or the true self. This "self nature" is intrinsically without movement. When Kyôzan poses his question about the sleeping monkey, it would appear that he knows about that true self that is always still, at least from viewing this question. Chûyû then realized that Kyôzan was already well along in his practice and understanding.

Chûyû descended from his Zen seat, grasped Kyôzan and said, "O monkey, monkey, there you are!" Chûyû was sitting high up on his Zen seat. Without hesitating, he descended from that seat and grasped Kyôzan, saying, "O monkey, monkey, there you are!" "So you're the monkey!" he says. That is all there is to the main case. Up to then, Chûyû had been assuming that Kyôzan was still a greenhorn. But on hearing Kyôzan's question, he realized that he was actually facing a formidable opponent. Actually, it is Kyôzan who goes down in history as the great Zen personality. Chûyû is not very well-known to us, but Kyôzan was a very famous Zen master and outstanding Zen adept. At the time of this exchange, Kyôzan was a lot younger in years, and Chûyû was already an old hand. Nevertheless, I feel that Kyôzan was vastly Chûyû's superior in terms of his natural endowment as a Zen adept. At any rate, the old monk Chûyû was aware that the young monk Kyôzan had clearly realized self-nature and must have been quite delighted. We can sense that in his words: "O monkey, monkey, there you are!" He says in effect, "Now I realize that you are quite a monkey", which means quite a Zen adept. We now examine the Introduction to this koan.

### ***On the Instruction:***

Across the river a battle of wisdom: hiding the soldiers, laying an ambush.

The "river" in this line refers to the Yangtze River. There are two armies on either side of the river. But because the river is so wide they cannot engage in an actual battle. Instead, they are conducting a battle in their heads. The Chinese classical novel known as the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* includes a description of the Battle of Red Cliffs in which the kingdom

of Wu and the kingdom of Wei are fighting against each other. The general of the Wu army was Zhou-yu, who was quite a sharp fellow. The leader of the Wei army was the famous Cao Cao. As mentioned, the two armies confronted each other at Red Cliffs. Zhou-yu worked out a plan in which he gathered large trees and bushes, after which he soaked them with oil and set them on fire. This huge mass of burning wood was caused to flow in Cao Cao's direction, so that Cao Cao's army suffered major damage and was wiped out. In the case of a battle where both armies are on either side of a great river, hand-in-hand combat is out of the question and it's more a battle of wits. The "river" can be considered concepts and thoughts from a Zen standpoint. You can consider Chûyû and Kyôzan as the protagonists in battle. In that case, they transcend that river of concepts to face off with each other. In that sense, the mondo (question and answer) that comes prior to this is not a real dharma combat, but rather one fought in the head. To say that the soldiers are lying in ambush means that the soldiers take off the armor they are wearing because such armor would reflect the sunlight and attract attention. Lying in ambush is a good tactic when they are separated from each other. But what about when they are facing each other?

Facing each other, they fight with the pointed spears and sharpest swords. Now they are locked in mortal combat. In Zen terms this would be the point where Chûyû suddenly descends from the Zen seat and seizes Kyôzan, or could be seen as Kyôzan posing his question, "How about when the monkey is asleep?"

It's not so much a battle with spears and swords, but a battle of words.

This is why the patch-robed monks value total activities and great functions. When it gets to this point, it's what's inside that counts. Unless you have truly grasped your true nature, you won't be capable of "total activities and great functions."

Starting slowly, changing briskly – I will try to gush it all out. Look! There are the lines from Sunzi's *Art of War*:

*At first, then, exhibit the coyness of a maiden, until the enemy gives you an opening; afterwards emulate the rapidity of a running hare, and it will be too late for the enemy to oppose you.*

That is close to what is being said here. The same can be said for the Main Case of today's koan. At first, Kyôzan comes on very leisurely and relaxed, asking all sorts of questions before the question that begins today's koan: What does Buddha-nature mean? But finally he shows wonderful pluck and mettle, brandishing a great sword and closing in on the enemy with his question: "How about when the monkey is asleep?" Then Chûyû descends from the Zen seat, grabs Kyôzan and says, "'O monkey, monkey, there you are!" This, too, is an example of "total activities and great functions."

### ***On the Verse:***

The verses in the *Book of Equanimity* were written by Wanshi Zenji, a monk of the

Soto School, who also chose the cases for inclusion in the work. Later, Banshō Rōjin (Old Man Banshō) wrote the introductions as well as the longer commentaries to the individual sections. Wanshi Zenji, the one who chose the cases and wrote the verses, corresponds to Setchō Zenji, the one who did the same thing for the *Blue Cliff Record*. Wanshi Zenji corresponds to Engo Zenji, who wrote the longer commentaries for the *Blue Cliff Record*. Let us look now at the verse for this koan.

Sleeping as if frozen in a snow-covered house; the year is ending. The original words for “the year is ending” also have the meaning of crumbling away and becoming weary, in the sense that the year is diminishing in days. This line evokes a scene of absolute silence. It seems to be speaking about our true self, where there is not the slightest movement. The same holds for the following line:

The quiet gate with ivy and wisteria – it does not open. The word translated here as “quiet” (Japanese: *yôchō taru*) actually has two meanings. The first meaning is “elegant and refined” such as in the expression “an elegant lady” (*yôchō taru shukujō*). Indeed, there is the Chinese saying using the above expression and originating in the *Classic of Poetry* (Shih-Ching), China’s oldest poetry collection:

*The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady:*

*For our prince a good mate she.*

The same characters are used to describe the profound silence deep in the mountains. The gate in this verse line is covered with ivy and vines. Even in daylight it remains closed, and at night the silence is even deeper. There is no need to open it. These two lines are depicting the essential world of our own true self. But then comes the next line:

Trees in the garden, withered in the winter, perceive the change of the climate. Here we have a scene of a garden in winter, where all the flowers have withered and the ground is covered with snow. However, they “perceive the change of the climate.” They are aware of slight changes. The situation has changed somewhat. Although up to now it was completely deserted without a soul around, things have changed somewhat. What is this talking about? There’s suddenly something quite glittering and sharp there with the question: ““How about when the monkey is asleep?” The atmosphere’s changed slightly. Up to now there had just been a description, but there is no real Zen in Chūyū’s description. It’s only when Kyōzan poses his question that things suddenly take on a special light. This is what is meant by the line: Trees in the garden, withered in the winter, perceive the change of the climate.

The spring wind blows away the ashes in the wooden pipe. This is also based on an old story. The pipe could be of wood or of bamboo. You sometimes see bamboo receptacles for flowers or the like. Ashes created by burning soft grass such as reeds or the like are inserted in the container. If you then put that receptacle in a room and shut the room so that no air comes in, when spring comes and it gets warmer, the ashes suddenly jump up from the bamboo receptacle, because they know that spring has come. Although it was winter up to now, very peaceful and quite, it is only here that spring arrives. What part of the koan is this referring to?

This would be the part where Chûyû suddenly descends from the Zen seat, grasps Kyôzan and says, “O monkey, monkey, there you are!”

It’s the arrival of spring and the advent of prosperity, a swing from the negative to the positive. Just where it had been winter up to now, the flowers suddenly bloom. This is how the verse comments poetically on the main case. The *Book of Equanimity* is filled with references to events or literary works from the past. Evidently the authors possessed quite broad learning.