

CASE 94

**Tōzan Unwell**



By Yamada Kōun

*Instruction:*

The lower do not discuss the higher; the humble do not move the dignified.

Even if one rules over oneself and follows the others,  
One should not burden the heavy by the light.  
When the four elements  
are not in order, how would one attend and serve?

*Case:*

Tōzan was unwell. A monk asked, "Your Reverence is unwell. Is there anyone who does not become ill?" Tōzan said, "There is." The monk said, "Does the one who does not get ill take care of Your Reverence?" Tōzan said, "'The old monk' is properly taking care of that one." The monk said, "How about when 'your Reverence' takes care of that one?" Tōzan said, "[The old monk] does not see that there is illness."

*Verse:*

Casting off the stinky skin bag, rolling over the bulk of red flesh;  
Right here the nostrils are straight, right now the skull is dried up.  
The old doctor doesn't see the previous traits [of illness];  
The young one can hardly encounter him and approach him.  
When the water in the field becomes meager, the autumn lake recedes;  
Where the white clouds are no more, the old mountains are cold.  
It must come to a complete annihilation – don't cheat!  
Fully exhausting non-accomplishments, he attains his state;  
Lofty and solitary, he does not share the same level as you.

Because I treated the Instruction and the Main Case the other day, today I will present a teisho on the Verse. Nevertheless, unless I present a brief overview of the Case, it will not be possible to understand the meaning of the Verse.

Tōzan was unwell. A monk asked, "Your Reverence is unwell. Is there anyone who does not become ill?" The Tōzan in this koan is not Tōzan Ryōkai, the founder of the Soto School of Zen. He is Tōzan Shusho Zenji, who belonged to the Unmon School. At that time of this koan he was evidently sick. The monk seeing to his needs paid a sick call on him and asked the question in the koan: "Is there anyone who does not become ill?"

He is asking in effect, if there is someone in Tōzan who does not become ill. He is talking about the phenomenal self and the essential self. The essential self is found by examining your own mind and arriving at the place where there is not a single thing. We would speak in terms of total emptiness. You realize this as your true self. You also realize that the essential self and phenomenal self are completely one. The purpose of practicing Zen is to experientially grasp that empty self. When you realize satori, you realize that the self which you had been believing to be a fusion of mind and body is actually empty. You could say that we find here the essence of Buddhism. This is what the monk is asking about with his question. Is there a master who is never sick?

Tōzan said, "There is." The monk said, "Does the one who does not get ill take care of Your Reverence?" The monk is asking: Does your essential self, who never becomes sick, take care of your self, who is now sick?

Tōzan said, "'The old monk' is properly taking care of that one."

"That one" means the Tōzan who is now sick. "The old monk" means the essential Tōzan.

The monk said, "How about when 'your Reverence' takes care of that one?" He is asking: How does your essential self take care of the self who is sick.

Tōzan said, "[The old monk] does not see that there is illness." When examining this koan in the dokusan room, it is this final statement of Tōzan that the student is grilled on. We turn now to the verse.

***On the Verse:***

Casting off the stinky skin bag, rolling over the bulk of red flesh. This is the same thing as "body and mind fallen away" (*shinjin-datsuraku*), as Dōgen Zenji expressed it. You must realize clearly in actual experience that body and mind are empty in content. This is the reason that students are given the koan Mu to practice with.

Right here the nostrils are straight, right now the skull is dried up. When Dōgen Zenji returned to Japan after having realized great enlightenment under Nyojō Zenji. He said: "Only by chance did I meet my late teacher Tendō and became able to realize directly that the eyes are horizontal and the nose is vertical; thus I am unable to be deceived by others." This means that he clearly grasped his own essential nature. There is no need to search here or there. Just as you are, precisely where you are, you are OK. This is what is meant by these lines in today's verse. To say that the "skull is dried up" means that all delusive thoughts have disappeared.

The old doctor doesn't see the previous traits [of illness]. The "old doctor" means essential nature itself. This line is saying that there is no illness in the essential world. Essential nature has no beginning. And because it has no beginning, it has no end. Because it is unborn, it can never die.

Yamamoto Genpō Roshi, the former abbot of Ryūtakuji Temple in Mishima, often said, "Don't ask. It does not say anything, it does not go anywhere. It is always right here." Bankei Zenji was very ill in his younger years, probably from tuberculosis. He built a small hut and hired an old servant to bring meals to him. He was prepared to die. But suddenly he realized: All things are perfectly resolved in the Unborn. Following that, he regained his appetite and gradually became well again, living quite a long life. He later became the abbot of Ryūmonji in Amiboshi near the city of Himeji. Lately, people who have had an experience of the Unborn have become fewer. If you are lacking this experience, you are lacking the power to save others.

Recently I paid a visit to Nanzenji Temple in Kyoto, which is quite an impressive place. Nowadays, however, there are few people who go to that temple to solve the basic problem of life. And there are no persons now at that temple who have the power to guide others toward a solution of that basic problem. I can say this as a result of what I have seen and heard in various places. The same is true about Christianity. Many priests and sisters have come to practice here at my zendo. In most cases, people are simply told that they must

believe. But if it is religion in the true sense, the need to believe in that sense disappears. If you have truly realized, there is no need to simply believe in something.

If you have seen it with your own eyes then no matter what others may say, you know it is the truth. Even if Shakyamuni Buddha or Bodhidharma were suddenly to appear on the scene and say that your experience is false, you would be able to say, “No, I am firm in my realization.” This is only possible if you have truly experienced it yourself.

Although this San’un Zendo might be a small zendo, I would like somehow to guard and maintain this kensho experience. I feel we can leave matters of intellectual knowledge of Buddhist ceremonies or the proper method of reciting sutras to the temples. Although it might sound like boasting, I truly believe that this experience should be the means to save Zen Buddhism, to pull it out of the fire, so to speak.

The young one can hardly encounter him and approach him. The “young one” means the monk in the phenomenal world. It is difficult to approach “him,” meaning the one who does not get sick, the essential self.

When the water in the field becomes meager, the autumn lake recedes;

Where the white clouds are no more, the old mountains are cold. The state of consciousness of the enlightened person is often compared to an autumn landscape. These lines are singing the praises of Tōzan’s state of consciousness. This is the state of consciousness where all “heat” in the sense of delusive thoughts or guile has disappeared.

It must come to a complete annihilation – don’t cheat! But even that experience of satori, that enlightened state of mind, must be thrown away. People who practice Zen must realize satori, but then completely rid themselves of any stink of satori. You should not deceive yourself. How do you check yourself on this point? Many people will become perturbed when problems arise, and then deceive themselves by drinking, for example. Nowadays, you have the feeling that the streets of the city are lined with establishments specializing in this sort of self-delusion as they stimulate our senses with all sorts of distractions, whether it be loud music or whatever. You have the feeling that children growing up in such an environment won’t amount to much. These days, scholars and other important persons gather together to discuss the problem of education. I myself would like to teach children to learn to sit still. The best thing would be for them to sit in silence for two or three minutes at the beginning of the class. There have been examples of this. Yasutani Roshi, speaking from his own experience teaching in schools, says that, although there might not be a sudden change as a result of such silent practice, if you continue it for a year or two, the children in the class will gradually change.

Neon signs also overstimulate our senses. Sports are fine when it’s a matter of exercising the body. Nevertheless, there should also be times when we sit still in silence. I can’t help feeling that that should be the basis of spiritual training in modern education.

At any rate, it would be a great error to assume that we are ever finished with our Zen practice. At least we know we still have practice before us if we are not truly at peace within. But even if you arrive at that place where there are no worries, you must not simply squat on your haunches, so to speak, and think you have reached the ultimate. There is truly no end to your Zen practice. Indeed, there is the stance that even the Buddha himself is still practicing.

Fully exhausting non-accomplishments, he attains his state. Having come to great enlightenment, you must wipe all traces of enlightenment and return to your ordinary original self. This is the essential, intrinsic human being. And having done so, “he attains his state,” which means you arrive at the original state of the human being. You return to your basic, intrinsic self.

Lofty and solitary, he does not share the same level as you. This lofty and solitary state, like on top of a high mountain, is known as the “master within the master.” Such a person is not eating the same food as you. It is as if he were living on air.

If you grasp your true self, you realize that the content is empty. To repeat the words

of Dōgen Zenji: Body and mind fallen away (shinjin datsuraku). But then you must also throw away that enlightenment. It is only when even the slightest trace of satori has disappeared that you attain the state of the intrinsic person. But that is very difficult to achieve.