

CASE 95

Rinzai Draws a Line



By Yamada Kōun

Instruction:

When the Buddha comes, one hits him;
When a devil comes, one hits him.
If there is logic, thirty blows;
If there is no logic, thirty blows.
Does one betray malice and hatred through misapprehension?
Or is one not able to distinguish the good?
Try to say it, and I'll see!

Case:

Rinzai asked the temple steward, "Where have you come from?" The temple steward said, "From selling brown rice in the province." Rinzai said, "Did you sell all of it?" The manager said, "Yes, I sold all of it." Rinzai drew a line with his staff and said, "Have you sold all of this too?" The manager shouted, "Kaatzu!" Rinzai immediately struck him.

Later, the cook monk came to Rinzai, who told him about this incident. The monk said, "The steward didn't understand Your Reverence's intention." Rinzai said, "How about you?" The monk made a deep bow. Rinzai struck him likewise.

Verse:

Rinzai's whole activities – sublime are the tones:
An eye is on top of the staff, distinguishing the thinnest hair.
The lone rabbit is swept away – severe is the family tradition;
The fish is turned into a dragon – its tail is burned through lightning.
The sword that gives life, the blade that kills life;
It glitters on the snow against heaven, sharper than the hair-severing sword;
Equally commanding, yet differently to be savored.
The very spot that causes massive pain – who can meet it?

On the Instruction:

When the Buddha comes, one hits him;

When a devil comes, one hits him. Rinzai Daishi had a very clear eye of satori. You could say his experience was very clear and simple. We have an example of this in today's koan. From times of old, people have spoken of Rinzai's shouts of katsu and Tokusan's blows with his stick. Whatever he was asked, Rinzai would respond with a shout of "kaatzu!" In this

case, he hits with his stick. Knowing that all attempts at explanation are of no use, he hits with his stick. He is very severe. So it's been said that the Rinzai School for this very reason has survived to this day. Even when Dōgen Zenji travelled to China, he said that it was basically only the Rinzai School that was still remaining. Evidently the Rinzai School ruled the Zen world starting at that time. Among the original five schools of Zen, however, there was also the Igyō School. Isan, one of the original founders of that school, was evidently quite a mild person and quite permissive. It might be for that reason that the school did not survive. I too believe that there must be this element of strictness in Zen. I would like you all to examine the sect spirit of the Rinzai School. This is expressed in these first lines of the Instruction. Whether the Buddha comes or a devil comes, they both get hit with his stick. The next lines are written in the same spirit.

If there is logic, thirty blows;

If there is no logic, thirty blows. Whether you speak logically or illogically, you still get thirty blows with his stick.

Does one betray malice and hatred through misapprehension?

Or is one not able to distinguish the good? In other words, does Rinzai act like he does out of malice? Or does he just hit with his stick whether or not one is able to distinguish good from bad or not?

Try to say it, and I'll see! An example will now be given. No matter what comes, if our mind is clear, it is Buddha. No matter what comes, if our mind is sullied, it is a devil.

On the Case:

Rinzai asked the temple steward, "Where have you come from?" The temple steward said, "From selling brown rice in the province." The "temple steward" (Japanese: inju) would be something like a general affairs manager in a modern company. He is the person who is responsible for all the affairs in the temple. This temple steward had been out on an errand and Rinzai happened to see him returning to the temple, whereupon he asked him, "Where have you come from?" In reply, the steward said, "From selling brown rice in the province." Back in those days, the temples were far away from the beaten track and not in the middle of town. The monk had been to the market to sell rice that had evidently been harvested at the temple.

Rinzai said, "Did you sell all of it?" The manager said, "Yes, I sold all of it." Although it might seem like they are just passing the time of day with their exchange, these words contain a deeper meaning. With this second question, Rinzai starts to show some of his true intention.

Rinzai drew a line with his staff and said, "Have you sold all of this too?" What is "this" in Rinzai's question? This is the world of oneness. At the same time, this action of drawing a line completely reveals the essential world of Rinzai Daishi. It is his true self completely revealed. Or it might be that, in drawing the character for "one," he was expressing how we are attached to that world of oneness. He is then asking the monk if he has divested himself completely of any ideas of oneness or enlightenment. In the end what finally remains is the consciousness of a separate self. He is asking the monk if he has rid himself of any ideas of someone who has realized enlightenment. He is checking the state of consciousness of the monk with his question. How does the monk respond?

The manager shouted, "Kaatzu!" Rinzai immediately struck him. How fitting of a student of Rinzai to give a great shout. With this shout of "Kaatz!" all concepts and ideas are swept away. And at the same time, it produces the essential world where all concepts have been swept away. But Rinzai immediately strikes the monk with his stick. You would have thought the monk was OK in his response, directly producing the world of not a single thing. But Rinzai strikes him. Why did he do that? This is a very subtle juncture in the koan. It could be taken as his response to remaining attached, perhaps, to that world of

emptiness. Thus, it would be a case of chiding the monk for still carrying emptiness around with him. The koan then continues.

Later, the cook monk came to Rinzai, who told him about this incident. If the head monk or steward monk appears in a koan, he is usual lacking an enlightened eye. In many koans the kitchen monk also takes the stage, and he usually has quite a clear Dharma eye. The kitchen monk or temple cook is always busy preparing meals for the monks, struggling away in the kitchen out of sight of the others and doing his best to serve up delicious meals. Although his work as the temple cook is unpretentious and unspectacular, he is very painstaking and meticulous. As I just said, if the temple cook appears on the scene, he usually has a clear dharma eye, although that might not definitely be the case in today's koan. At any rate, Rinzai related to him the former exchange with the temple steward.

The monk said, "The steward didn't understand Your Reverence's intention." The kitchen monk says that the temple steward was not familiar with Rinzai's world of enlightenment.

Rinzai said, "How about you?" The monk made a deep bow. Rinzai struck him likewise. Rinzai seems to be saying, "Are you still carrying such ideas around with you?" Whatever you bring it is not enough.

Many of you are familiar with the book entitled the *Record of Rinzai* (Japanese: Rinzai Roku). My first Zen master was a master of the Rinzai School named Kōno Sōkan Roshi, who later became the abbot of Hōkōji Temple. He was active for a time in Manchuria, a part of which, known as Manchukuo, was a Japanese colony at that time. During that same period, Yamamoto Genpō Roshi was residing at a branch temple in Shinkyō (Chinese name: Shinjing, modern-day Changchun), belonging to the mother temple of Myōshinji in Kyoto. Acting as his attendant (jisha) was Nakagawa Sōen Roshi, who was my roommate during our days at the First Higher School. I learned many things from Sōen Roshi, who must have been wondering at that time what in the world I was doing in Manchuria. A very diligent and studious person, he would regularly visit the library in the evening to study during our high school days. Because this was the period just after the Great Tokyo Earthquake of 1923, the library was located in a small temporary structure, as the original library had been destroyed. It was to this smaller temporary structure that he would go each evening to study. As for me, I was so happy to have passed the entrance examination for the higher school that I evidently spent a lot of my time idling away the hours. One day, however, I happened to visit the library and then ran into Sōen-san afterwards. "It's really quite a nice feeling to visit the library after not having been there for so long," I confided to him. Whereupon he said, "It would have been nice if you'd had realized that a lot sooner!" As this anecdote shows, he influenced me in many ways back then. When we first got to know each other he gave me a book and told me to read it. It turned out to be the *Orategama* (The Embossed Tea Kettle) by Hakuin Zenji. The book made an indelible impression on me and gradually led to a growing interest in Zen. My first Zen master, including Kōno Sōkan Roshi, delivered teisho solely on the *Record of Rinzai*. I myself once delivered a teisho on a passage from that same work. This was quite a while ago when there were no cassette tape players to record the teisho, so I can't remember what I actually said. At any rate, it concerned the following section of the *Record of Rinzai*:

An eye is on top of the staff, distinguishing the thinnest hair.

A monk asked: "What are Buddha and Mara?"

The master said: A moment of doubt in your heart is Mara. But if you can grasp that the ten thousand things are unborn and that the heart is like an illusive fantasy, then no thing even of the size of a speck of dust exists — everywhere is purity — this is Buddha. It may be said that Buddha and Mara present the pure and the tainted state; yet as I see it there is no Buddha, no living being, no past, no present.

Those who can realize this, do so at once, without training or testimonial, without gain or loss. There is no other Dharma. Were there a special one, I say it is like a phantom and a dream. This is all that I teach.

This reference to “Buddha and Mara (embodiment of evil)” reminds us of the first line of today’s verse: When the Buddha comes, one hits him; When a devil comes, one hits him. In response to the monk’s question, Rinzai replies: “A moment of doubt in your heart is Mara.” In other words, if you pause to think about it, it is already Mara. Then Rinzai says, “But if you can grasp that the ten thousand things are unborn and that the heart is like an illusive fantasy, then no thing even of the size of a speck of dust exists — everywhere is purity — this is Buddha.”

This statement that “the ten thousand things are unborn” is important. Bankei Zenji of Akao was the abbot of the temple Ryūmonji. In his younger years he contracted tuberculosis and his health worsened increasingly to the point that he was near death. He had given up hopes for living longer. He built himself a small hut and had an old man bring his meals to him as he waited to die. Although he was in such a sorry state, his spirit of seeking the true dharma was as intense as ever. One day he suddenly realized: “All things are perfectly resolved in the Unborn” (*fushō ni shite issai ga totonou*). If we intrinsically are not born, there is no death. Because we think we have been born, we believe that there is dying. Bankei Zenji used the expression Unborn Zen to describe his approach, for which he was famous. I consider him to be a very Japanese Zen master. There are several persons from the past whom I would also consider to be typically Japanese Zen persons. In China, too, many unique and outstanding Zen personages appeared, persons who said things that no one else had ever said. Among these outstanding persons in China and Japan ranks Bankei Zenji. Not only are we ourselves unborn. As Rinzai says, “the ten thousand things are unborn.” That means that all things are intrinsically empty. The same thing is said in the *Heart Sutra*: He clearly saw the emptiness of all five skandhas. The “five skandhas” are the aggregate of all phenomena. The principle of salvation in Zen lies in grasping this world of emptiness. Rinzai goes on to say: But if you can grasp that the ten thousand things are unborn and that the heart is like an illusive fantasy, then no thing even of the size of a speck of dust exists.

He says that, if we truly realize, we see that the heart is like a dream, like a fantasy. Then “no thing even the size of a speck of dust exists.” “Everywhere is purity.” Your true essence is lacking the slightest stain or speck of dust. “This is Buddha,” Rinzai says. He goes on to say: It may be said that Buddha and Mara present the pure and the tainted state; yet as I see it there is no Buddha, no living being, no past, no present.

Finally he says: Those who can realize this, do so at once, without training or testimonial, without gain or loss. There is no other Dharma. Were there a special one, I say it is like a phantom and a dream. This is all that I teach.

This is the reason for the statement in the Instruction:

If there is logic, thirty blows;

If there is no logic, thirty blows.

If there are even the slightest concepts, you should receive thirty blows with his stick because it is far from the true fact. This is the Buddha-Dharma of Rinzai.

Rinzai Daishi was originally a student of Ōbaku Zenji, but was unable to come to realization there. So he finally went to Daigu Zenji. When he was still studying with Ōbaku, he was asked by the head monk why he had never been to dokusan, although he already been at the temple for three years. Rinzai replied, “Because I don’t know what I should ask.” Then the head monk said, “Is that so? Well in that case, go and ask him what the ultimate great meaning of Buddhism is.” Rinzai immediately went to dokusan and asked the question, whereupon he was hit by Ōbaku. He returned to the head monk without saying a word. The head monk asked him what had happened. Rinzai told him that he had asked the question as instructed and had been hit by the master. He was told to go once more with the same question, and once more he was hit. This happened three times with the same result. Then he went to Daigu with the same question, explaining how he had been instructed by the head monk to ask the question and how he had been hit three times by the master. Daigu then said, “Did Ōbaku treat you with such grandmotherly kindness and you are still asking where you were at fault!? What a useless fellow you are!” In that instant Rinzai suddenly realized. He

had evidently come to ripening within, so that he could instantly realize upon hearing Daigu's words. For this reason, his dharma eye was extremely clear. Although it might seem strange to relate, Dōgen Zenji originally was beside himself with praise for Rinzai, saying that Tokusan was clearly no match for him. However, starting at a certain point, his opinion of Rinzai changed radically. This time he said that Rinzai was not in a position to know Tokusan's world. This is a problematical point. Professor Fumio Masutani took up this matter in his book "Rinzai and Dōgen." I had the pleasure of visiting the professor at his home in Totsuka. Although this might be my personal view, I feel that, Rinzai, although he had a very clear enlightenment experience, had not really returned to his ordinary self. The Zen spirit of Dōgen Zenji is one of having to realize, but then cleaning away all traces of satori and returning to your original ordinary self. Because Rinzai had not completely returned to that original ordinary self, Dōgen Zenji was not completely satisfied with him, I can imagine. And nevertheless, Rinzai Zenji is a truly outstanding Zen master. If I had the chance I would like to delve somewhat more deeply into a comparison of the state of consciousness of Dōgen Zenji and Rinzai Zenji.

On the Verse:

Rinzai's whole activities – sublime are the tones: This is not limited to Rinzai. All true Zen masters reveal the essence in their every action. Thus "sublime are the tones" (kakucho takashi). It means that their spirit is lofty.

An eye is on top of the staff, distinguishing the thinnest hair. There is an eye on his stick. When he hits someone with his stick, it is not a blind or indiscriminate action. He can clearly distinguish the state of consciousness of the other person. That is expressed with the words, "distinguishing the thinnest hair." Such a discerning eye is on his stick, which means he will never hit someone mistakenly. The "thinnest hair" (shūgō) refers to the thin hairs that appear when animals lose their fur in the fall. He does not miss seeing even the thinnest hair.

The lone rabbit is swept away – severe is the family tradition; The "lone rabbit" means a fake. It means someone who has not truly realized and plays around with concepts. There is also the expression "fox Zen" (yakozen). He sweeps away all such fake Zen monks. This is the lofty Zen spirit of Rinzai Zenji.

The fish is turned into a dragon – its tail is burned through lightning. There is a legend behind this line. According to an old Chinese story, if fish swimming up the Yellow River succeed in swimming through the passage known as the *Dragon Climbing Gate* (Tōryūmon), they turn into dragons, whereupon lightning strikes, burning off their fish tails. They then become true dragons and ascend into heaven. The verse says that Rinzai Daishi possesses such powers to turn fish into dragons.

The sword that gives life, the blade that kills life; A single sword has the power and freedom to kill and give life. To "give life" means to bring people to realization. To "kill" means to take away all their concepts and thoughts.

It glitters on the snow against heaven, sharper than the hair-severing sword; There is also the Zen saying:

*Having cut off
The two heads, yes and no,
The sword soars
Alone into the sky.*

When Yoshio Ohishi took his leave from his Zen master and was engaged in questions and answers, he was given this verse. Here it is expressed a little differently: It glitters on the snow against heaven. The Japanese word *susamajii* appears in both cases, meaning a glittering sword, so that not the slightest room remains for fear. The final case of the *Blue Cliff Record* is Haryō's Sharpest Sword, which also appears at the end of the *Miscellaneous Koans*. That final koan also includes Setchō's Verse where the first line says:

You have to even out the uneven.

This has two meanings. The first meaning is bringing all unrest under heaven to peace. The other meaning is to bring your own mind, constantly in turmoil, to true peace. In Zen terms, it's naturally the latter that we're interested in.

The second line reads:

Even the great adept seems inept.

Sometimes on the finger, sometimes in the palm.

Leaning against the sky, it shines on the snow.

This is actually the origin of the lines in today's case.

Then the *Blue Cliff Record* verse continues:

Even a great smith cannot hone it;

Even a master craftsman wouldn't finish polishing it.

It is exceptional, unique:

Each branch of coral supports the moon.

As for Rinzai, as I mentioned several times already, when even the slightest concept enters in, it is no longer the real thing. Let us look at the next lines of today's Verse:

Equally commanding, yet differently to be savored. "Equally commanding" could refer to how he gave both the temple steward and the temple cook a blow with his stick. It is the same hitting, but the way of appreciating it is different. What the steward savored and what the cook savored was different.

The very spot that causes massive pain – who can meet it? Being touched on a sore spot is the most painful. This is not limited to the body. When a spiritual sore spot is touched we experience pain. Most people will react with anger. The poet asks just how many of us are able to truly feel that pain. Most people are not even aware that there is a sore spot. Many will drink to drown out their pains. That certainly won't do. You have to realize directly upon being hit. Many non-Japanese will consider it reckless and rough to hit in such a way. But I feel that unless there is use of the *kyosaku* it won't really amount to anything.