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## Zen Psychology: Koans

*The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen, in it there is no value—and if there were, it would be of no value.*  
—L. Wittgenstein

*Hitherto I have been solving several Problems. For in learning the Sciences, Examples are of more Use than Precepts.*  
—I. Newton, *Universal Arithmetick*

*Koans are one of the distinctive forms of Zen practice. In form, koans are texts containing statements, questions, dialogues, or brief descriptions of situations involving the Master that were offered to disciples for reflection. Despite all of their variety in form, they can be understood only from one position—through recognizing and overcoming one’s limitedness. A limited consciousness cannot recognize the framework of its limitation; this requires an instrument that does not overlap with consciousness—the intellect. A short history of Zen and collection of koans is presented in the chapter.*

Buddhism is now considered one of the world religions, but it became a religion not thanks to, but in spite of, the doctrine of Gautama, who opposed any dogmas, authorities, or blind faith. Academician F.I. Shcherbatskoi, a well-known Orientalist, wrote that this doctrine proclaims: “a world edifice without a god, a psychology without a soul, the eternity of the elements of matter and spirit, causality, heredity,

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Translated by Steven Shabad.

a vital process instead of the being of thing, a negation of private property and of national narrow-mindedness, universal brotherhood among people, and a movement toward perfection” (Shcherbatskoi, 1919, p. 48). The search for objective criteria of the reliability of understanding within the framework of Buddhist philosophy led to the creation of a special school of logic, which is most fully represented in the works of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti (first millennium A.D.). In analyzing cognition, the Buddhists, like certain schools of modern mathematical logic, ran into the problem of the language of science (the “theory of names”), the theory of relations and negative characteristics of comparable essences and the breakdown of cognition in accordance with the categories distinguished by the intellect. The research in this field advanced Buddhist philosophy to the top ranking not only in India but far beyond its boundaries: in Tibet, China, Japan, and other countries. Buddhism came to China from India in the first century A.D. and underwent intensive “Sinification.” The Chán (Japanese: “Zen”) school of Chinese Buddhism originated at the end of the fifth and beginning of the sixth century A.D. and is viewed by many researchers as a continuation of the tradition of Daoism in new conditions. In the view of the Chán Buddhists, discursive thinking based on the principle of binary opposition creates by itself binary relationships, fragmenting the whole into parts and counterposing them to one another. As a result, the unity and holism of being is destroyed, and a person begins to alienate himself from his inner nature, counterposing his individual ego to all objective reality, which begins to be perceived as an external, object-based reality.

While Confucianism attached enormous importance to a sign system in general and to verbal texts in particular,<sup>1</sup> the Chán Buddhists posited that all of the precepts and the texts in which they were recorded were false precisely because they were verbalized. This principle was clearly formulated by the legendary Indian missionary Bodhidharma (Japanese: “Daruma”): “Not founded on words and letters” (Watts, 1957, p. 236). A similar approach is found in Daoism, where Dao (the Path) is something not susceptible to verbalization<sup>2</sup> or description in terms of differentiating characteristics, something “formless” and “boundless.” This postulate received further development in the Buddhism of Mahayana, all of whose schools also agreed that true reality cannot be expressed by linguistic means (Radhakrishnan [Radhakrishnan], 1956, p. 508). An awakening becomes possibly only when a follower is liberated from an attachment to words and symbols. Therefore, the Lankavatara Sutra, on which both the Madhyamikas and Yogacarans relied, calls Buddha’s words “wordless.” The idea of nonverbal understanding of true reality was closely linked to central categories of Buddhist philosophy such as *nirvana*, *shunyata* (emptiness), *anatman* (“no-self”) and others.

The name of the new school of Buddhism—“Chán”—derives from an abbreviated version of the Chinese transcription of the term *dhyana* (meditation). But although meditation played an important role in Chán Buddhism, it was practiced in conjunction with many other methods of psychic and bodily self-regulation. These included breathing and gymnastic exercises,<sup>3</sup> physical labor, a special diet,

self-massage techniques, and others, which were supposed to reinforce the effect of meditation. In the process of meditation, whose “content” was *shunyata* (emptiness) and an escape from oneself, the follower intuitively contemplated his own psychic flow, his feelings, thoughts, aspirations, and so forth. As a result, he would discern that everything he could discern in this flow had no separate, independent existence and was illusory. Any meditation, however, was pointless until the follower became aware of the reasons for his narrowness and their sources. This awareness was achieved by means of verbal and nonverbal communications between the disciples and the Master and by resolving the “paradoxical” problems of *gong-ans* (Japanese: *koans*).

Koans are one of the most distinctive forms of Zen practice. In form, koans are texts containing statements, questions, dialogues or brief descriptions of situations involving the Master that were offered to disciples for reflection. As a rule, they were presented as records of precedents of student awakening, in order to underscore their “esoteric” orientation for followers.

Many researchers attempt to interpret koans as an expression of a certain thought, psychic state or mode of thinking of the Master, expressed in the form of a riddle (Abaev, 1989). Researchers attribute this form of presenting knowledge to the fact that the Master must take the student out of verbal, formally logical thinking and a “conventional” state of consciousness into some other “altered” state of consciousness. But even with these assumptions, researchers always conduct their analysis of koans within the framework of *their own conventional* consciousness. Very often a symbolic or metaphorical treatment of koans is applied within the framework of some religious or other cultural-historical tradition (sometimes even a Western orientation).

All this has led to the point where some writers completely give up even attempts to comprehend Buddhist discourse. For example, Carl Jung, in his foreword to the book by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, writes: “The original Buddhist writings themselves contain views and ideas which are more or less unassimilable by the average Western understanding. I do not know, for example, just what spiritual (or perhaps climatic?) background or preparation is necessary before one can deduce any completely clear idea from the Buddhist *Kamma*.”\*

Indeed, from this perspective scientific, verbal, and logical inquiry into koans as a result of some nonverbal “thinking,” and in some “altered state” of consciousness to boot, is an utterly impossible task. If, however, we consider koans as a specific psychotechnology used by the Teacher to help students overcome their concrete difficulties on the path of grasping the reasons for the limitedness of their consciousness, many problems in understanding koans disappear. In this regard, one must always bear in mind that discovering the meaning of any koan is feasible only in a Buddhist context and in the concrete situation that generated it.<sup>4</sup>

Buddhism is often understood as a philosophy of Nonbeing, death, self-destruc-

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\*Translation taken from C.G. Jung, “Foreword,” in D.T. Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 9.—Trans.

tion, or asceticism, a loss of all the values of Being and indifference to death. But in fact this is not true. The point is not indifference to death but an understanding of its meaning. For example, how would an autumn leaf feel about its death if it had time to perceive itself as a tree? And would this very perception not be the death of its former individuality? Then, actually, what or who dies?

Since the main task of Zen followers was to overcome the limitedness of their consciousness, the first stage in executing it will be to intellectually grasp the reasons for this limitedness. One of the most important reasons for the limitedness of consciousness is our verbal, logical, sign-based mode of reflecting and comprehending Reality. With the aid of concepts one delimits Reality by applying a kind of virtual, conceptual grid of coordinates to it, but it is impossible to exhaust the nonfinite with the finite.

“We spent the whole day debating Zen. What can be learned from our debate?” Isan asked.

Kyozan drew a line in the air.

“If you showed this to someone else, he would not understand,” said Isan.

(Blais [Blyth], 2001, p. 244).

Zen practices the integrated, undivided understanding of Reality. Any attempt at a verbal understanding is analytical and leads to a division of Oneness and pushes the disciple further away from the goal. In effect, Isan and Kyozan were engaged in dividing Oneness rather than understanding it. Analyzing (partitioning) the Absolute with the aid of concepts is the same as drawing a line in the air. Any concept divides and limits Reality, turning it into a virtual object, that is, destroys it as a reality—this is what Kyozan recognized.

The sacred texts only point out the limitedness of consciousness and what can be expressed in words, but not what “lies” behind these limitations.<sup>5</sup>

Since any motivations and goals originate from the finite (the inner tension of a biological, psychic or social system), the overcoming of limitedness can be only external, since the attainment of any goal is always a “removal,” the overcoming of a specific tension. Only satori—a powerful insight experienced by the follower when there is no inner tension at all—can “cast” him beyond all boundaries (to Nirvana) rather than to a finite goal.

In order to achieve satori, Zen followers had to, at the very least, recognize the following aspects of their limitedness (we will try to express them in contemporary concepts):

1. Stop identifying themselves with their needs. Recognize them as something causally dependent, limited, external (rather than internal), as a “thing” perceived through “internal,” interoceptive sensations (emotions). Since, unlike conventional “external,” exteroceptive sensations, they have a positive or negative “coloration” determined by the instincts of self-preservation, the inner experiences of pleasure and displeasure are linked to them. Therefore, the

student had to learn to perceive in a detached manner as something external that was inherent only in his biological “covering.”<sup>6</sup> Recognize their individuality as a limited form (a reference system) through which the subject expresses a new content in samsara.

2. Recognize that objects are identified by the intellect as external means (in contrast to internal instinctive mechanisms of self-regulation) of satisfying specific needs (compensation for a specific need or internal stresses) in various conditions. This determines their meaning for the subject. Hence their limitedness and causal dependency, as well as the limitedness of any meaning and goal.
3. Recognize the absurdity of identifying Reality with one’s essentially semiotic representation of the world. Understand that by means of sensations, perceptions, and words each of us creates only a virtual model of Reality (a mental map of the world), which is not identical to reality itself.
4. Understand that any process express a certain finite content, described by a certain set of laws and rules, according to which we can intellectually predict its realization in the future. In this context, a process can be represented as a modification of form on a certain content. Recognize that any rules and laws (identical to a certain content) are the limitations of that process. That any processes that express a finite content are essentially tautological.
5. Understand the semiotic principle of constructing any symbol (concept) as an opposition: the contraposition of “something” to the “other.” Recognize that any symbol-based representation of Reality is always limited by this principle. Understand that the Absolute (Buddha, *bodhi*, “infinity,” etc.) is not a concept (symbol), since there is nothing to counterpose to it, and therefore conceptual thinking about it is illegitimate and leads to logical contradictions. The absolute is not a “thing.”
6. Recognize that the intellect itself is merely a means of conceptual thinking. Understand that space and time are a method of intellectually ordering objects (the “markers” of reality) on a mental map rather than attributes of Reality itself. Understand samsara as an infinite tautological, mechanistic process that takes place in the context of finite content in the form of a cause-and-effect relationship (karma).
7. Recognize that all of the components of the ego—corporeal, emotional, intellectual, and others—are essentially externally generated, limited, and mechanistic. Understand that any goal-oriented activity in samsara is always the effectuation of limited content. Understand that any goal-oriented “acts” are always directed toward Being and are limited. That only creativity itself can overcome limitedness. Recognize that only the work (initially intellectual, later meditative) in differentiating oneself as a form from all of its limitations (biological, social, and others) can increase the probability of “total insight” (satori or awakening) of “identification” with the nonfinite (Nirvana).
8. Recognize that the Subject is an attribute of the unity of the world that is

counterposed to the “object-based” world. Recognize creativity, Evolution, and insight as the appearance in samsara of new content, as a transition from “Nonbeing” to “Being” (“nonact”) that is not generated by the content of Being, as a manifestation of the Subject in formation. Understand that the Subject is “counterposed” to the object-based world (to samsara or Being), and consequently, is not Being (Subject  $\equiv$  Nonbeing  $\equiv$  Nothingness). Understand that only an “empty” form that has no qualitative or quantitative limitations (“Nothingness,” *shunyata*) is capable of expressing “Everything” (nonfinite content).

Let us examine how these aspects of limitedness are revealed in koans. Since in some cases, in order to explain koans, we will need cross-references from one koan to another, we have numbered them (the number is in the upper left corner of the text of the koan in parentheses) and have consolidated them into specific semantic clusters, set off by a yin–yang symbol. In addition, in discussing koans, we cite several parallels from the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas (hereafter GT and the logion number) (Okulov et al., 1989).

Originally the Zen follower, with the aid of prompting from the Master, would recognize, by means of the intellect, his limitedness and its reasons (in effect, he would “probe the fence” limiting his consciousness). Then, using meditative techniques, he would differentiate the ego from the “probed” self-limitation.



(1)

“What is the Path?” the monk asked Joshu.

That which starts behind the fence.

(Blais, 2001, p. 223)

Here the Path, or Dao, is undetermined creativity or total freedom. Creativity “comes” to the limited from the limitless and cannot be formalized in finite content (inside the “fence”).

(2)

Tozan told the assembled monks:

“Words do not express anything, you cannot aid a task with words, a believer in words will inevitably perish, a repeater of the words of others will become deluded.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 114)

Conceptual thinking expresses only limited content and cannot comprehend the absolute (the limitless). Therefore, comprehension of Nirvana cannot be expressed with words, although a creative act may also be manifested in verbal form, becoming solidified in it as a result, but not as a process. Furthermore, the process itself is not discernible in the result.<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, the path to the awakening of each disciple is conditioned on his

mentality and is extremely individualized, just as the koan itself posed by the Master is specific.

(3)

The abbot answered Tozan's question ninety-six times, until Tozan did not accept his answer after the ninety-seventh time, saying:

"Why did you not answer that way from the very outset?"

There was also another monk, who knew all ninety-six answers, but had not heard the last one. He asked the abbot to tell him this answer, but the latter would not do so. The requests continued for three years, while the two monks worked in the kitchen, but the abbot did not give in the whole time. One day the abbot became ill, and then the other monk came to him and said:

"For three years I have asked you to tell me what you said that time. I will not do it anymore. If you have not agreed to tell me in a kind manner, I will find out no matter what it costs me!" Here he held a knife over the abbot and exclaimed:

"Either you tell me, or I will kill you!"

"Wait! Wait! I will tell you everything!" the terrified abbot said, and added after a pause:

"But even if I tell you, you will not receive what you need the most!"

The second monk bowed gratefully.

(Blais, 2001, p. 121)

The intellect can determine its limitations, but a logical analysis of someone else's understanding does not overcome one's own mental dead end. It is like a joke that must be explained—it will not generate laughter. Only one's own insight, rather than logical thinking, can overcome the limitedness established by the intellect. For the first time in three years the second monk managed to recognize this.

Usually disciples would come to the Master with some goal (to master *siddhis*—consummate abilities), to learn the meaning of the world, or to understand God. But more often than not, the dominant motivation was the fear of death. Obviously, from case to case the Master had to conduct his work with such disciples in different ways.

The monks could not ask direct questions about Buddha and "Buddhahood," since one could be struck with a stick for this: it is impossible, by means of concepts with limited content, to uncover nonfinite "content"—a disciple who has embarked on the path of awakening must already recognize this. The paradox is that monks come to a monastery *with the goal* of achieving satori—recognizing "themselves" as creativity, that is, escaping the limitations of mechanical causality. But the goal is a component of the motivation, which stems from a specific and therefore always limited need, which we experience as emotion. If the limited specific inner experience (of pain, for example, or of humiliation) is capable of stopping this "striving" for the nonfinite and the universal, of putting the disciple at a dead end,

then it originates from a limited source and this path is therefore the wrong one (one cannot receive the nonfinite as a thing that satisfies a specific need). On the path of satisfying needs one can only achieve compensation for a specific deficiency (need). Emotion is always a qualitative and quantitative measure of the intensity of this deficiency, but the limitless cannot be measured by a quantity. Disciples had to recognize from their own experience that everything that originates from a need and is related to emotions, feelings, and desires is limited (this is not Dao). Objects appear on an individual's "mental map" as symbols of the means of fulfilling a certain need. If this semiotic function disappears, the object itself also disappears. Consequently, an object is conditioned on a function and the object-based world, in essence, is conditioned on a subject's needs and is not, in this sense, a separate "objective" reality, but merely a symbol (*maya*). The mental map replaces Reality itself for the individual.

The following koan may be an example for the above:

(4)

Gettan asked a monk:

"Keichu made a hundred carts. When we remove the wheels and pull out the axle, what will we have?"

While asking the question, Gettan used a stick to draw a circle in the air and exclaimed:

"And don't think of taking the mark on the scale as the weight!"

(Blais, 1997, pp. 85–86)

Disciples often confuse recognition, which always takes place in a creative act, and logical reasoning that links the chain of causes and effects in the context of limited content (axioms and rules of inference). The intellect is capable of establishing identity between different forms of a certain finite content, but not of going beyond its boundaries. The Master must show the disciple that the intellect, in effect, establishes limits to consciousness and is not its source. The only thing that is capable of expanding the boundaries of consciousness or taking one beyond the limits of the intellect and of attitudes is the creative act itself, which is always external to the intellect with which the disciple identifies himself. The indirect questions of followers allow the Master to understand the specific inappropriate attitude in which the disciple has become "stuck" and to subtly "instill in him" a prompt (koan), leaving it to the disciple to recognize it for himself and thus experience the creative act.

A carriage does not exist by itself as an object—it is we ourselves who "make" carriages (objects). Has the carriage disappeared after the "decomposition," or has only our interpretation disappeared, since what is left is no longer able to satisfy our needs and therefore ceases to be identified by us as an object? Then what we regard as an object is essentially a symbol, which we perceive as an object. As we make this substitution "hundreds of times," we are no longer capable of recognizing it, although



it is obvious that the “weight” (the property) and the “mark on the scale” (the symbol) are not the same thing. This delusion has become our most rigid attitude.



(5)

“What is the meaning of Daruma’s coming from the West?” the monk asked Seigen.

“Then he left again.”

“Please say a few wise words to me.”

“Come closer!” The monk approached.

“Write this down clearly,” said Seigen.<sup>8</sup>

(Blais, 2001, p. 31).

The question “What is the meaning of Daruma’s coming from the West?” is an attempt by the disciple to intellectually arrive at the source of creativity. Daruma is the awakened one, pure creativity, the one who “brought” Buddhism to China from India. The discovery of the meaning of his action signifies the establishment of the ultimate cause of creativity itself,<sup>9</sup> which the monk is attempting to find with the aid of his intellect.

The meaning of an action is uncovered by comparing it with a deficiency (need) and the conditions of satisfying it. Therefore, the meaning is always limited in content, unlike the creative act. The attempt to uncover the ultimate meaning of Daruma’s behavior degenerates under this approach into a temporal sequence of a series of states (he came only to leave again “later,” etc.) that have no relation to Zen. The Master intentionally generalizes his answer, and thereby strips it of meaning—he cannot give the adherent anything in the attainment of satori. Although a creative act is performed in specific (local) conditions, it is based on the total “content” of the world rather than a specific, limited situation. The continuity (connectedness) of the change in form does not signify that the content is immutable and limited. Daruma does not violate any physical laws in his behavior, but the “meaning” of his actions does not boil down to them, just as the meaning of an utterance does not boil down to the meanings of specific words or to the grammatical rules of the language through which it is made.

The monk did not understand the verbal prompt and asks Seigen himself to say something “wise” that is engendered in the creative act, believing that his request and the desire<sup>10</sup> of the Master to fulfill his request will become the cause of the act. Consequently, he will in reality demonstrate to the Teacher that one can approach the cause of a creative act and thereby work it out intellectually. Seigen assumes the form of an “effective,” experimental communication that has been proposed by the monk himself as the one closest and clearest to the disciple. In effect, the Master is showing that the follower’s first and second questions are identical (the spatial changes in Daruma’s position in the “East–West” system and the spatial movements in the “disciple–Master” system). In order to show that it is wrong

to replace the nonfinite Subject with his finite reference system (Daruma or the Master), he asks him to “come closer” to this cause, which he considers his life goal. The monk physically approaches (draws nearer to) Seigen—the “designated” place—and that is all. The “coming” of Daruma to China by itself, like the monk’s “approach” to Seigen, does not reveal the nonfinite cause of creativity and does not bring one closer to it. In performing this action, the monk himself, without suspecting it, refutes his delusion. An attempt to intellectually understand the Teacher means the same thing as “squeezing” the limitless into the limited. The monk’s goal in reality is to imitate the place, form, and limitations rather than overcome them (which cannot be achieved at all as a goal). All that remains is to recognize this action, and the Master applies the koan: “Write this down clearly.” There is nothing for the monk to write down verbally, because the Master’s response was an “empty” form, which can only express “Everything.” If the monk believes that he has drawn nearer to creativity (awakening) or achieved understanding, then all that remains is for him to use his intellect to express this content (what you have attained) precisely (through meanings) with symbols. Obviously, using words that have specific meanings, it will not be possible to express anything but a trite description of the situation of drawing nearer to the place where Seigen is “located.” By using the deictic pronoun “this,” the Master proposes that the disciple himself uncover and recognize the pragmatic aspects of his attitude.



(6)

“What is *bodhi*?”<sup>11</sup> the monk asked Tokusan.

“Get out of here! Do not bring dung here!”

“Who is Buddha?” Tokusan was asked another time.

“An old monk from the Western world.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 44)

We are describing and conveying to others knowledge described by a sign system. Therefore, any knowledge is limited by the conditions for determining a symbol.

First, the symbol of something takes on meaning only when it is contrasted with another symbol (a traffic light that is always green means nothing). *Term* in general was revered in antiquity as the two-faced god of boundaries.

Second, in order for a symbol to serve as a means of communication, it must have a fixed meaning (or a finite number of meanings predetermined by context). If a symbol defines everything (the Absolute), then it is not contrasted with anything and does not have any finite content and, consequently, is not a symbol. Its use leads to logical paradoxes such as: can God create a rock that he cannot lift? The attempt to define (the same as limiting) the Absolute reduces it to an object

In our comments we have already discussed the senselessness of the question of defining the Absolute. By attempting to recognize the nonfinite as a limited concept, the disciple reduces the extreme to a symbol (obtaining an eternal mechanical past<sup>12</sup> and total death<sup>13</sup> instead of “liberation,” that is, a “living” future). From

the standpoint of a “subject–object” relationship all objects are equivalent to one another. In this sense “dung” is no better than any other object. Ultimately, all objects are reducible to one another (redefinable) in Being: one can obtain gold not only from lead. By limiting *bodhi* in concepts, the monk reduces the awakening of Buddha to an object. The Master, in effect, suggests to the disciple that the latter came to the monastery to rid himself of the finite, which compels him to live in the object-based world of samsara, but brought with him from the worldly life all of the attitudes that limit him (“dung”).

Since the monk was unable to recognize this absurdity and asked a second question, thinking that it was different from the first one, the Master provides a more neutral hint: through concepts, one can express Buddha only as a reference system—a designated “place.”

(7)

Tozan was weighing flax when a monk asked him:

“What is the Buddha?”

Tozan replied:

“Three pounds of flax.”

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 134)

The question “what is?” may be asked only in regard to something limited, something that can be measured. Any thing (phenomenon) in science has a full description if it includes three parameters: quality (flax), intensity (three), and rigidity (pounds). If a monk visualizes Buddha as an object, then he, like everything in his reality, is described in a similar manner. Buddha in the monk’s conception (“What is the Buddha?”) is in fact his reality as limited by intellectual perception. The nonfinite cannot be measured and it is impossible to find Buddha in the finite as a nonthing. What has been measured and defined is finite and is a thing.

(8)

“What is the Buddha?” a monk asked Ummon.

“A dried-up wiping stick.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 136)

Wooden sticks were used as toilet paper in China. In the monk’s conception Buddha is essentially not more than a thing: “three pounds of flax” or “a wiping stick”—what is the difference? There is one principle of a thing’s existence in Reality—limitation. The intellect (mind), by limiting consciousness, engenders objects. In order to underscore the attachment of monks to an object (“*What is the Buddha?*”) and the object-based world (no matter what “sacred” conceptual garb it is “dressed” in), Master Lin-Chi, for example, described Buddha as “a hole<sup>14</sup> in a privy”; the legendary founder of the Chan school Bodhidharma as a “bearded barbarian” (the same as “an old monk from the Western world”—see koan 6); *bodhi* and *nirvana* as “hitching posts for donkeys<sup>15</sup>”; and religious meditation as a “stubborn fool’s errand.”<sup>16</sup> His exhortation to disciples was similarly extreme: Kill Buddha, kill the patriarch!<sup>17</sup>

(9)

Daibai asked Baso:

“What is the Buddha?”

“The mind is the Buddha,” replied Baso.

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 148)

It is the intellect and intellectual perception, which differentiates everything, that makes Daibai define Buddha as a thing (“what”). Therefore what limits Buddha to a thing is Daibai’s mind. This is the functional definition of the “Buddha” that is represented in Daibai’s question. Baso’s reply is a clue: “Your question is a creation of the intellect (‘it is the mind’), you yourself are the Buddha that has not yet become aware of itself.[”] Baso in effect is addressing Daibai as the Buddha (“The mind is the Buddha”). Apparently, Daibai, after all, felt that the Master had established an identity: the mind  $\equiv$  the Buddha.

(10)

A monk asked Baso:

“What is the Buddha?”

“This mind is not the Buddha,” replied Baso.

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 151)

This mind of a monk, which limits the perception of reality, is not the Buddha. Monks often tried to understand Buddha as a “cosmic law,” the Logos of the world, *dharma*. But any law is a limitation.

(11)

“Who in the world understands Buddhism?” a monk asked Ummon.

“A pillar in the temple courtyard!” Ummon replied, then cried out “Katz!” and added:

“You are a dead toad!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 141).

Although the subject and the object are counterposed to each other as categories, they cannot be visualized simultaneously. The ego (“you”) is nothing more than a thing generated by instinct (a “dead toad” or a “wiping stick”). The Master gave an absolutely precise answer: “You (the ego) are a dead toad,” although the monk, most likely, took it as an insult—a kind of blow with a stick for a direct question about the Absolute. Since Buddha, *Bodhi*, and Nirvana are the Absolute, which “includes” everything and with which “nothing” and “nobody” can be contrasted, the monk’s question is absurd. Buddhism as a doctrine, a concept, is no more “sacred” or spiritualized than a “pillar in the temple courtyard.” As long as an object exists (“you” or a reference system), only *something* (a thing), but not the Absolute, can be contrasted with it. Here “Katz!” is an exclamation, a symbol that has no “object-based” meaning, as a definition of “he who understands Buddhism,” that is, has awakened. The Master gave a truly elaborate answer.

(12)

“What transcends the bounds of Buddhas and the patriarchs?” a monk asked Ummon.

“Buns.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 136)

This is indeed the case if one identifies Buddha and the patriarchs with the body (otherwise what “bounds” are meant?). It is a bit crude, but true. The disciple need hardly be interested in this result of their activity (or, for that matter, any other one related to a reference system that is limited by definition—see koans 6, 8, and 13).

(13)

“What is the Dharmakaya?” a monk asked Seppo.<sup>18</sup>

“Karma is born in the mouth, but a wiping stick is not to be chewed.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 66).

Dharmakaya is Buddha, God, the Absolute, which the monk worships, limiting himself to the “sacred” canon and rituals. Since the Dharmakaya is named, it becomes a thing or an idol and an additional limitation of consciousness.

Karma, the causal connection among phenomena, is created by the intellect together with a second signal system—speech—and mechanistically limits Reality. An understanding of the limitedness of a sign-based description of the world may be grasped with the aid of the intellect, but it is impossible to use it to transcend these limitations, since the intellect itself generates these limitations of consciousness (“karma is born in the mouth, but a wiping stick is not to be chewed”—see koan 8). If the follower has grasped the limitedness of words, he will no longer use them for other than their designated purpose.<sup>19</sup>

(14)

“What will happen if one were to express everything in the world with a single word?” a monk asked Ummon.

“A rupture! A breakup!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 140)

To express the nonfinite in the finite is to bring the whole world to a logical contradiction, to an absurdity that has no right to exist. Since Armageddon has not occurred and you have not yet disappeared as a subject, the world is still Formation rather than a thing.



(15)

When Tenno<sup>20</sup> was near death, monks came to him and asked how he felt. Tenno ordered that the *tenzo* be summoned.<sup>21</sup>

The monk approached his bedside.

“Do you understand?” Tenno asked.

“I do not understand,” the *tenzo* replied.

Tenno seized a pillow, flung it at the monk, and died.  
(Blais, 2001, p. 43)

If a leaf overcame its limitedness and recognized itself as a tree, its previous “inner” essence would become external to it. The question of the death of the leaf, as its previous essence, would no longer affect it at all. For Tenno his body is nothing more than a pillow, and the monks’ question about how he feels before his death is no different from a question about the condition of his bedding. The Teacher used this situation to help disciples recognize their delusions regarding the Subject and the reference system (the system of the Subject’s local “presence” or the form of translation of the evolutionary “process”). He sends for the monk who is responsible in his job for clothing. Since neither the *tenzo* nor the other monks understood the situation, he “stages” a miniature koan-play: he flings the bedding he no longer needs at the *tenzo* monk simultaneously with his own body.

In order to disidentify in followers Zen, death, and the transition to parinirvana, Masters often arranged special kinds of “performances” for disciples. For example, it is well known that the third Chan patriarch Sengcan met death (606) standing up and with welcoming, clasped hands. As Chih-hsien from Huan-chi was dying (905), he asked: “Who is in the habit of dying while sitting?” “Monks,” came the reply. “Who dies standing up?” he asked again. “Enlightened monks,” came the reply. Then he dropped his hands and began to pace back and forth and, after taking seven steps, died.<sup>22</sup> When Teng Yin-feng prepared to die in front of Diamond Grotto on Wutai Mountain, he asked: “I have seen monks die sitting and lying, but has anyone died standing?” “Yes, some have died standing” came the reply. “Well, how about dying upside down?” he asked. “We have never heard of such a thing!” came the reply. Then Teng stood on his head and died. His sister, a nun, who was there, said: “When you were alive, you took no notice of rules and customs, and even now that you are dead, you are disrupting public order!”<sup>23</sup> (Blais, 1959, pp. 93–94).



(16)

Ryutan stayed with his teacher Tenno for three years and asked him one day:

“I have stayed with you for so long and to this day have received no guidance!”

“How is that? Have I not been teaching you anything all this time?”

“When did you teach me?”

“When you would bring me tea, I would accept it. When you would bring me food, I would take it. When you would bow to me, I would respond by nodding. Was I not teaching you?”

Ryutan kept silent, immersed in thought.

“If you want to understand, understand it at once. When you begin to think about it, the meaning eludes you.”

(Blais, 2001, pp. 43–44)

Ryutan assumed that Zen could be understood only as a result of training. Satori, however, as the ultimate insight that “expels” beyond all limitations, cannot be a result of any finite chain of causes and effects and is not reducible to a finite content. Only limited knowledge (a thing) may be conveyed. Any theory, as limited content, engenders sequences of forms that are identical within the boundaries of this content (tautologies). In contrast to creativity, mechanistic movement is rigidly determined by the content, and cause always straightforwardly determines the effect, as the past determines the future. Development in this case degenerates into mechanics and, in effect, is restricted to the past. Essentially this is death. Ryutan had to recognize in insight the entire foolishness of his request, rather than deductively link the Teacher’s words to his limited concept of the nonfinite. Creativity is always external, it cannot be reduced to finite content and conveyed as a concept. The Master here exaggerated learning as a formal, always tautological adherence to the everyday rules of etiquette. Such learning is pointless for the attainment of satori.

(17)

A monk said to Joshu:

“I have just come to your monastery. Please teach me.”

“Have you eaten your rice porridge?” asked Joshu.

“I have eaten,” the monk replied.

“Then wash your bowl,” said Joshu.

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 122).

See the previous koan.

(18)

Nansen said:

“Mind is not Buddha, learning is not the Path.”

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 152)

See koans 9, 10, 17, and 18.



(19)

“What is the eternal and fundamental principle of things?” Zuigan asked Ganto.

“Movement.”

“What is movement?”

“When you watch the movement of things, don’t you see their eternal and fundamental principle?”

Zuigan was racking his brains.

“If you agree with this, you are still in the dust of this world; if you disagree, you will forever drown in a sea of birth and death,” Ganto concluded.

(Blais, 2001, p. 54)

Any content is expressed in subjective reality as a process of a change in form or “movement” in space-time. By “watching the movement of things,” we discover the content of the process. This is the classical approach, which studies mechanistic movement as a tautology, since all forms of this process are reducible to one another in this limited content. This destines the disciple to look at the world as an infinitely repeating finite process (samsara). If he attempts to mechanically include in this world Development, which changes content in a leap and disrupts causality, the world will appear in the form of completely indeterminate Chaos. Zuigan must recognize that these approaches are mutually complementary (creativity precludes a mechanistic approach) and cannot be logically unified within the framework of a single concept, although one cannot exist without the other. Recognition of this will enable him to overcome one of the mechanistic limitations of the intellect. Indeed, if you need to introduce the category of the “material” for some purpose, it may be defined, according to semiotics, only as an opposition to the “ideal.” So these concepts appear only simultaneously, and debating which of them is primary is the same as discussing whether the northern or southern hemisphere originated earlier when defining the equator. Only by counterposing object-based reality to subject-based reality can one achieve an understanding of the Subject as an attribute of the unity of the world. Obviously, the Subject cannot be described through a finite set of properties and their intensities, since this reduces it to an object. Therefore, “subjects” cannot be distinguishable. A Subject is not reducible to any finite content (otherwise Evolution degenerates into purely mechanical movement) and cannot “exist” in time (like its reference systems). The concepts of birth and death are not applicable to it. But any content that exists in time has its beginning and end, which are defined as stages of Evolution. When an organism, as a biological reference system of the Subject, reveals its content in ontogenesis, it comes to an end. If the disciple accepts Evolution, but lives in time (in formation, “watching the movement of things”), he identifies himself not with a Subject but with a reference system and, consequently, exists in a world of “birth and death.”

Movement (the regular process of a change in form) is the only mode of existence of finite content (of things) in space-time. If the disciple reduces the world only to this type of movement, he is a dead machine. If he disagrees with this, he reduces the world to the arbitrariness of the Absolute. Both are ignorance (the cause of birth and death).



(20)

Tekei said to his monks:

“If I took it into my head to set forth the very essence of our religion, you would have to evict everyone from the hall and close the door tightly, because wherever the Law is revealed to the end, there are no people left.”

“I am not afraid of death! I ask you to reveal the Law, no matter what happens to me,” said a monk.

“Can the essence be entrusted to you?”

(Blais, 2001, p. 76)



The attainment of *Bodhi* is incompatible with limitedness. In effect, awakening is simultaneously the death of identity and individuality. Wherever the Absolute “is,” there is no individuality. The monk’s passionate desire to grasp the Truth simply suppressed the instinct of self-preservation. Since desire and instincts are what limit individual consciousness, it cannot accommodate the limitless (in order to fit the nonfinite into a limited vessel, it is necessary that the “bottom falls out,” as the Zen masters would say).

(21)

“I shaved my head, but on a black robe, and adopted monasticism. Why should I be considered Buddha?” a monk asked Seppo.

“Nothing compares with an absence of goodness.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 61)

Monks, as a rule, came to the monastery for the purpose of attaining *Bodhi* (awakening). They believed that the path to it lay through the attainment of sanctity. Any need (motivation, goal) a specific tension, which is experienced by us introspectively as emotion (desire). Relaxation (meditation) increases the probability of a creative act, which through an “external” stimulus (from the “environment”) “expels” us from a state of tension into one of compensation, similar to how water expels upward from its depth an air bubble by the most efficient method. We experience this as insight, which brings us to the most optimal algorithm of reaching the goal. In this case, the creative act engenders in Being a new finite content. Given that new content cannot be obtained from old content, the only way for it to develop is from Nonbeing into Being. Since specific Being that has taken a clear form is the past in relation to Development, Nonbeing essentially is its future (creativity always violates causality and the future in relation to the past is “nothingness”).

The strained form that an individual who experiences a specific need constitutes is always limited. “Immersion” in Nothingness during meditative relaxation removes the tension and “fills” individual consciousness with a new, concrete limited content (leads to satisfaction of the need). Nonfinite content can be expressed only by an absolutely free form (essentially, Nothingness)—a form that experiences no tension. When immersing himself in meditation, a follower at this point must be free of all limitations of the intellect, instincts, attitudes, desires, and so forth. Meditation to attain *satori* is nonsensical.

A disciple may subordinate all vital instincts to himself in asceticism, but only by counterposing to them a need of a different type (for example, the attainment of goodness, sanctity, and so forth on the path to awakening). This, however, leads not to the removal of tensions but only to their compensation. These tensions thereby only increase. This is similar to when a child receives an unbreakable toy with which he can break all his other toys. The question is, what will he use to break that toy? A paradoxical situation results: the more the disciple wants to achieve awakening, the more difficult it will be for him to do so. If a monk decides that he must, on the contrary, break away from goodness (become a “sinner”), then,

in going to the other extreme, he remains in the limited. He must recognize the sources of his desires as something external to his consciousness. Both goodness and its reverse are impediments to awakening.

(22)

A monk asked Hsueh-feng:

“How can one touch sanctity?”

Hsueh-feng replied:

“Even the most innocent infant cannot do this.”

“If he forgets himself,” the monk asked again, “can he touch sanctity?”

“He can do this when it touches him,” replied Hsueh-feng.

“Then,” the monk continued, “what will happen to him?”

“A bee never returns to the hive it left,” came the reply.

(Sendzaki [Senzaki] and Mak-Kendzl [McCandless], 1993, p. 37).

Only creativity (always the external kind) can afford liberation from the limited. It cannot come from within (from the limited). But meditation and an absence of instinctive stresses can increase the likelihood that it will come.<sup>24</sup> A total escape from the limited makes it impossible to go back (otherwise there will be a “rupture,” a “breakup,” see koan 14).

(23)

“I knock from inside the shell. Can you knock from outside?” a monk asked Kyosei.

“Are you in a state of active readiness?”

“If I were not ready, people would despise me.”

“You are still hiding in the grass!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 79)

Creativity (or the Master) must find the disciple. Although the occurrence of the creative act itself (insight) does not depend on the follower, on the path of dis-identification with the finite he continuously increases the probability of satori.<sup>25</sup> In other words, he increases the probability that creativity will “find” him. The monk understands that satori must “come” from without (see the previous koan) and asks the Master for help. The social motivation, however (the social, external causality is the wish for social approval) makes awakening impossible. The monk continues to be “unnoticed” (“hidden”) from creativity.



(24)

The Konkokyo sutra says: “He who sees form as nonform sees the Tathagata.”<sup>26</sup>

“He who sees form as nonform does not see the Tathagata,” said Hogen.<sup>27</sup>

(Blais, 2001, p. 88)

Since one can express or perceive nonfinite content only with the aid of an absolutely flexible (universal) form that does not possess any characteristics (i.e.,

from the perspective of the intellect, that is not a form from the perspective of the intellect and therefore coincides with Nothingness), then the Tathagata must indeed be perceived as Nothingness from the limitedness of Formation. In order to perceive it, however, you must become this absolute form; but once you achieve it you become the Tathagata yourself, and there is no longer anyone to perceive it.

(25)

Tokusan<sup>28</sup> came to Ryutan for the first time and said to him:

“I have heard the name Ryutan (Dragon Abyss) many times. Now I am standing before you, but where is the abyss here? Where is the dragon here? I do not seem to see them!”

“So you have now visited Dragon Abyss,” said Ryutan.

Tokusan bowed and left.

(Blais, 2001, p. 44)

It is possible to perceive only a thing (an object identified by the psyche according to certain rules, as a means of satisfying a need), that is, a factor that connects specific, limited properties. It is what cannot be seen that “is” the essence of Ryutan (a nonthing).



(26)

One day Seppo was cutting trees with Chosei and said to him:

“When you cut, do not stop until you cut to the heart!”

“I have cut and finished!”

“The masters of the past transmitted the truth from heart to heart. After this would you say that you cut and finished?”

Chosei threw his axe to the ground and exclaimed:

“The truth has been transmitted!”

Seppo struck him with his stick.

(Blais, 2001, p. 55)

New content “comes” to Being from Nonbeing. Mechanical causality is breached in a creative act. An individual is limited in perception by the future (Nonbeing) and the Past (Being). His world is the realm of Formation, where everything is quantitatively limited—a realm where the perception of difference is possible and, consequently, time exists as an interval. Any perception can be exercised only in the context of a certain time interval (for example, ton, color, and so on require the perception of at least one period of wave oscillation). An instant (as a point) is not time. With respect to the infinite it is impossible to notice any quantitative changes, so the Subject is always outside time (always in the present, he has “stopped”). Achieving the present is a radical overcoming (“to the heart”) of all limitations. A bottomless pit cannot be overcome in two moves, so the creative act of “awakening” must be total and instantaneous (satori).

Chosei understood what the Master was saying to him, and decided that this

understanding did in fact constitute awakening, and he achieved the nonfinite (he “stopped”).

After awakening, Masters helped their disciples—they “transmitted the truth from heart to heart,” that is, as if they “remained” in Formation. Chosei understood Seppo’s key question—“How then is it possible for the Master to exist in time if he has ‘stopped?’”—as a request to confirm that “absolute truth” had been transmitted “from heart to heart” to him personally, and he confirmed that he understood that the reference was not to cutting timber by dropping the axe and saying: “It has been transmitted!” The Master, however, has nothing to transmit to the disciple, since awakening and absolute truth are not things. So striking the blow with the stick was supposed to sober up the disciple, who fancied himself as Buddha.

(27)

“What is the Great Round Mirror?” Eimyo was asked.

“A broken clock.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 97)

The “Great Round Mirror”—a metaphor in the Tathagata—is that which is immutable (outside time) and is capable of encompassing the whole world (reflecting any movement while remaining immobile). That is what the Tathagata is. For it, time has “stopped.”



(28)

Seppo visited Enkan, then visited Tosu three times, then visited Tozan nine times, but all without result.

Finally he came to Tokusan and asked him:

“Is it possible for me to share with the patriarchs in the Supreme Doctrine?”

Tokusan struck him with his staff and exclaimed:

“What rubbish are you talking about?”

The next day Seppo asked Tokusan to explain what had happened.

“In my religion there are no words or utterances. There is no benefit to anyone from it,” said Tokusan.

Upon hearing these words, Seppo achieved enlightenment.

(Blais, 2001, p. 60)

Awakening cannot be achieved as a result of reaching any particular goal or satisfying a need, and hence there indeed cannot be any benefit from it. It cannot be expressed in a symbolic limited form and therefore cannot be conveyed in words.

(29)

The Nirvana sutra contains forty chapters of Buddha’s doctrine. How many chapters of the devil’s doctrine are there in this sutra?” Isan asked.

“All of them!” replied Kyozan.

(Blais, 2001, p. 245)

Buddha's doctrine is Liberation, but it cannot be expressed in concepts,<sup>29</sup> it is not dogma (see previous koan).



(30)

“Did the essence of Buddhism exist before the coming of Daruma?” Yakusan<sup>30</sup> was asked.

“Yes, it did.”

“Then why did he come?”

“He came precisely because the truth was already here!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 99)

Creativity breaches the cause-and-effect relationship. If, however, Daruma came *for the purpose* of bringing Buddhism, then it was *causally produced*, and then Buddhism must be limited. If the essence of Buddhism already existed, then where is the creativity here? Yakusan says that if there were no creativity, there would be no Daruma, either. The point is that creativity always exists. It is always in the present and never becomes past like its result.

(31)

“Are Zen and Buddhism the same thing or not?” a monk asked Seppo.

“The thunder cannot be heard in the room.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 66)

The question of whether awakening and religion (doctrine) are identical requires no answer, since any version of understanding did not bring the monk to awakening. The answer is obvious even before the question is posed. If the question is correctly posed, the answer to it is awakening itself, and therefore the monk's question already becomes pointless. Creativity breaches causality, hence the answer must come before the question, “Thunder does not rumble,” since the monk's “mechanical” intellect limits consciousness.

(32)

A monk asked Seijo: “I understand that a Buddha who lived before recorded history sat in meditation for ten cycles of existence but could not realize the highest truth, and so could not become fully liberated. Why was this so?”

Seijo replied: “Your question is self-explanatory.”

“But if the Buddha was meditating,” the monk asked, “why could he not achieve Buddhahood?”

“He was not a Buddha,” replied Seijo.

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 124).

The cause-and-effect relationship is breached in a creative act. Within the limited only tautological conversions of form are possible within the framework of these limitations. Therefore, a “non-Buddha” (limitedness) can never be converted to a

“Buddha” (limitlessness) within the framework of formal logic. The use of logic presupposes dividing a time segment into past and future, cause and effect. It is impossible to apply logic to an instant. This is the “eternal” present, in which there is neither past nor future. Satori must come “from outside.” But the moment in which satori comes is in fact “Buddhahood.” Meditation is not a cause of satori, but merely increases the probability of achieving it.



(33)

Kyosei, a disciple of Seppo, asked a monk one day what the noise was from behind the door. The monk replied that a snake there was swallowing a frog.

“I thought that life is suffering, but it turns out that suffering is life,” Kyosei replied.

(Blais, 2001, p. 117)

According to Bell’s theorem, locality and causality are incompatible. Then creativity, as a breach of causality, can be manifested only locally (i.e., in the limited). Any limitation, or unfreedom, is understood in Buddhism as suffering. To always be compelled, causally dependent, or unfree is suffering. But he who is always internally causally dependent is not alive (is mechanistic). Does a frog suffer from instinctive causal dependency? If internal causal dependency is broken, it takes place through external causal dependency (“a snake is swallowing a frog”), and then suffering occurs. Can this be called living?

Who is he who is free and, hence, does not suffer? Can one say that he is living? What relation does he have to the snake and the frog if it is only thanks to him that they are living (or suffering)? This koan, unlike the previous ones, does not contain a direct message, but raises ultimate questions that one can resolve only by “awakening.”



(34)

“Where have you come from?” Sozan asked a monk.

“I was cleaning up in the temple.”

“You were wiping the front side of the Buddha or the back?”

“Both sides simultaneously.”

“Please give me your robe!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 124)

The question “where are you from?” tests whether the disciple identifies himself with the reference system. There are two aspects here: the physical attachment (in space-time) and the sociobiological one (The “self” or the “ego”).

The monk understands that it is impossible to directly answer the question of where he came from (one could be struck with a stick) and gives an evasive reply, accentuating his “spiritual” work without recognizing either his connection to time (the past) or to the ego. The Master decided to take advantage of this and help him

by creating a koan. Every word in it is a message: *You* (identification with the ego) *were wiping* (a connection to time) *the front side* (spatial difference) *of the Buddha* (the Buddha as an object or thing that is wiped!) *or the back?* The monk decided that in his reply he would go beyond the limitations by mechanically *consolidating* the spatial directions at the same time: “Both sides simultaneously.” The consolidation of different elements, however, still requires a prior differentiation. The teacher immediately pointed out the erroneousness of this interpretation of the limitless. He asked (thereby limiting the monk) to give him a thing (the robe). By doing this, the monk exercised his causal dependency simultaneously in both the future and the past and gave two sides of the robe simultaneously. This is not an escape from the limited but scholasticism. Presenting a robe to the Master (to creativity) is the same as “wiping Buddha.”



(35)

“Seekers of Truth are hopelessly ill. Will you treat them?” a monk asked Sozan.

“No!”

“Why not?”

“A seeker of life does not find it; a seeker of death does not find it.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 125)

Those who seek Absolute Truth as a thing are doomed to fail. In Formation (the transition from Nonbeing to Being), where everything is limited, one can only find the results of creativity (Being), not creativity itself, since, from the standpoint of the limited, creativity is Nothingness. He who seeks it as Nonbeing (or death) is seeking Nothingness, which cannot exist in Being. He who seeks it in Formation as a source of the new (or as life) is seeking Nothingness, which does not yet exist in the present. That which may be found in the limited is a thing, and whatever is not a thing cannot be found in the limited. European thinking interprets the aspiration of Buddhists to *shunyata*,<sup>31</sup> as an aspiration to Nonbeing, that is, death. An attempt to find life in limited Being constitutes an aspiration to discern life as a thing, even though whatever animates the limited is limitless (creativity). In Being one can only discern a thing (something). Whatever is not discerned in Being is nothing (Nonbeing). And any attempt to discern Nonbeing in Being is absurd. As long as there is a “self,” there is no death, but when there is death, there is no “me.”

(36)

“As I press the jasper to my chest, I am rushing to you and asking you to polish it,” a monk said to Sozan.

“I will not!”

“Why not?”

“It would not hurt to know that Sozan is a skilled master.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 126)

The monk offered himself as a “thing” (a “piece of jasper”) with a request to “polish” him (make him into a Buddha), but one can only make a thing out of a thing. For example, a craftsman can, through some effort, make a statue of Buddha out of jasper. Creativity (the “skilled” Master) does not do work but merely realizes (chooses) a possibility if it exists. For the monk, with his attitude that he is a “thing” out of which the Master can make “something,” there is no such possibility.

(37)

One day Seppo and Gensha were fixing a fence, and Gensha asked:

“What is the meaning of the coming of Daruma from the West?”

Seppo shook the fence.

“Why make such an effort?” asked Gensha.

“How would you answer?”

“Give me the basket.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 70).

Seppo understood the Master’s question correctly and gave an appropriate response (he “shook the fence”), showing that such a question could have originated only from the limited. Gensha (the “skilled” Master) found a more elegant response, making Seppo causally dependent (i.e., limiting him) with his request and thus, without expending physical effort, performed a physical action by “moving” the basket.



(38)

“You monks spend your whole life roaming the country,” said Ummon, “but you still do not grasp the meaning of the coming of Daruma from the West. Even a pillar in the courtyard knows perfectly well what I am talking about now. Why don’t you somehow extract this secret knowledge from the pillar. But in fact, I will give it to you: nine times nine is eighty-one.

(Blais, 2001, p. 142)

Monks usually went one monastery to monastery in an effort to learn Zen from the Teachers, without realizing that one can only learn a mechanical algorithm (finite content and repeat it in different forms like a parrot). This is an eternal identity in limited content. For example, for commutative algebra:  $(a + b)^2 \equiv (a + b)(a + b) \equiv (a^2 + ab + ab + b^2) \equiv (a^2 + 2ab + b^2) \equiv (a + b)(b + a) \equiv \dots$  Only a creative act is capable of changing the content, but in developing it only generates a new mechanistic process, for example, noncommutative algebra, in which  $ab \neq ba$ . The laws of nature are also mechanistically applied by the pillar in the courtyard, which does not go anywhere. By collecting various theories, you only add new scenarios for the manifestation (demonstration) of your limitedness.



(39)

“Where were you?” Kyosei asked a monk.

“At the Three Peaks.”

“Where did you spend your summer vacation?”

“At the Five Peaks.”

“You will receive thirty blows!”

“What did I do wrong?”

“You simply go from temple to temple,” said Kyosei.

(Blais, 2001, p. 79)

The monk realized that with his question the Master was testing his understanding of the spatial-temporal and psychic limitedness (“where were you?”). The monk technically avoids the use of the words “I” and a geographical reference to a place (by simply naming the monasteries). The monk boasts of his “quantitative” progress in grasping Zen. This is the same as jumping over an abyss in “three” or “five” moves. The monk needed to work on himself rather than collect the knowledge of others in various places.

(40)

When Tozan came to Ummon for instruction, Ummon asked him:

“Where do you come from?”

“From Sato.”

“Where did you spend this summer?”

“At the Hoji temple of Konan?”

“When did you leave there?”

On the twenty-fifth of August.

“I spare you thirty blows with a stick.”

The next day Tozan asked Ummon:

“Why did I deserve thirty blows yesterday? What was my error?”

“You fat rice bag! You wander for no reason from the Western River to the Southern Island!”

(Blais, 2001, pp. 167–68)

In this koan, Tozan was not even aware that his connection to space-time and ego was being tested. He naively and honestly enumerates the temples where he “studied” Buddhism, for which he was spared thirty blows with a stick, since he cannot be spared anything else for his “travels.” There was nothing to punish Tozan, since he was not trying to conceal behind scholasticism his lack of understanding (see previous koan) and had not yet even become a disciple.

(41)

“How are we to avoid life and death?” a monk asked Ummon.

“Where are you now?”

(Blais, 2001, p. 143)

A map is useless unless you know your location (why ask where to go if you do not know where you are). First you must recognize the reason for your limitedness before you overcome it. But in limited Being it is impossible to comprehend either life or death (see koan 35). The Master's question may be translated as follows: if you are in the limited, then why should you avoid life (if you are a thing, then you are not even alive), and death is not a threat to you.



(42)

One day Ummon, after opening the gate, saw a monk coming and asked him:

“What will you do if you cannot live freely and easily?”

The monk was silent.

“Ask me!” Ummon commanded.

When the monk asked him the same question, Ummon began to bend over, swinging his arms and chanting:

“Come here, come here, my old Shakyamuni.”<sup>32</sup>

(Blais, 2001, pp. 143–44)

Ummon was depicting what the monk did (praying and performing rituals) instead of recognizing his limitations and becoming a disciple. The monk hoped to ask for Awakening (as a thing) by rehearsing a religious ritual to Buddha (the idol).

(43)

“What happens if a blind turtle looks for a hole in a floating log?” a monk asked Ummon.

“The old monk<sup>33</sup> leaves, prayerfully folding his arms!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 162)

The final awakening (the overcoming of limitedness) is always a creative act that is external<sup>34</sup> to a closed system. Therefore, an individual's efforts to “wake up” on his own are pointless. However, by recognizing the reasons for his limitedness, he can increase the probability of an awakening (actually, this is also true for an ordinary dream—in order to wake up more quickly, one must realize that it is a dream). But what does awakening consist of? How is the action itself of awakening to be explained?

The likelihood that an individual will be able *passively* in the course of his lifetime to recognize himself as the Subject and escape from limitedness has been compared to the likelihood that a blind turtle, surfacing from deep under the sea, will *by chance* fall into a hole in a log that is floating on the surface. Obviously, if it is *looking for* the “hole,” that is already a path to “awakening” and the probability of such an occurrence increases. At this stage religion and faith “move off” to the side.

(44)

“How do we rid ourselves of doubts?” Tyokei was asked.

Tyokei stretched out his arms in front of him.

(Blais, 2001, p. 76)

Faith makes it possible to rid oneself of all doubts. But then the incentive for understanding and “awakening” also disappears, since God as an absolute will not be limited by anything, and then absolutely nothing depends on your efforts. All that is left is to “ask” for something by stretching out one’s hands in prayer. In fact, doubts are an incentive for liberation—to understand oneself and the world.

(45)

A monk came to Seppo and bowed. Seppo struck him five times.

“In what way am I at fault?” the monk asked.

Seppo struck him five more times.

(Blais, 2001, p. 67)

Worship of Buddha is not the Path to awakening, but a religion. The Masters have beaten monks with sticks into religious worship of them as supreme beings.

(46)

Ummon told the assembled group:

“When the Old Barbarian (Buddha) was born, he pointed one finger at the sky and one at the ground, looked in four directions, took four steps, and said: ‘Under the heavens and above the heavens I alone am worthy of reverence!’ If I had seen him then, I would have beaten him to death with a stick and then fed him to the dogs so that he would not outrage the world with his exclamations!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 166)

Ummon is recounting a legend composed by believing Buddhists about the birth of Gautama (see previous koan).

(47)

One day, when Gensha was meeting with General Yi, rice cakes were brought to the table.

“What do we not know about, although we use it every day?” the General asked.

“Here, take it!” said Gensha, offering him a cake.

General Yi took the cake, ate it, and then repeated the question.

“We use it every day, but we do not know it,” said Gensha.

(Blais, 2001, p. 71)

We know any object in essence not as a “true” reality but as a symbol on a mental map, as a representation of a means of realizing a concrete need that is laid down by Evolution. The meaning of an object is always limited by the relevant need. Since there is no single science that explains Reality completely, we do not know what any thing is in and of itself.



(48)

One day Ummon asked himself:

“How can we make our religion correct?” And he immediately answered:  
“*Mu.*”<sup>35</sup>

(Blais, 2001, p. 146)

Any canon is a limitation. In order for a Doctrine to be correct, it cannot be regarded as a religion—it is an active path (method) of overcoming all limitations by recognizing them, not a belief. Consequently, the only way to make Buddhism correct is to reject it as a religion or a doctrine.

(49)

“What can one say about a person who has undergone all of the ascetic trials?” a monk asked Ummon.

“A cup in hand.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 147)

“What can one say about a person who has undergone all of the ascetic trials?”

He has created such a powerful, goal-oriented dominant idea (faith) that it is already virtually impossible to eliminate it. His only path is to become a canonical monk (a cup to collect handouts is their constant accessory). It is impossible, however, to ask for awakening as a thing.

(50)

“What can one say about a person whom his parents do not allow to become a monk?” a monk asked Ummon.

“That is shallow!”

“I cannot call myself an ignoramus, but I do not understand you.”

“That is deep!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 147)

The Zen Masters did not allow disciples to fall into religiosity. They were supposed to recognize “Why?” by themselves at their early stages as disciples. If the Master does not allow you to become a monk, then you have a chance for awakening, and you can join the disciples (this is still “shallow”).

It is formal intellectual knowledge (“erudition”) that is the limitation of consciousness. It prevents creativity from manifesting itself. The monk has managed to see in the Teacher that which cannot be causally explained (“I do not understand you”), and this is already the Path to awakening. The opposite situation is reflected in koan 25.



(51)

“What is a good relationship?” a monk asked Ummon.

“Do not call the place where you sleep a place for sleeping!”

And what can be said about a bad relationship?

“A place for sleeping!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 148)

In this case the reference is to the relationship between an individual and Reality, since a monk leaves all other relationships beyond the threshold of the monastery, renouncing all worldly things. The limitedness of *samsara* (Formation) for a disciple is a place for awakening, not for sleeping in the virtual reality that the intellect creates. A bad relationship is to identify one's dreams with reality. How can you wake up if you are not aware that you are asleep?

(52)

One day a monk asked Sozan:

“How does one express the ineffable?”

“Here it is not expressed,” replied Sozan.

“Where is it expressed?” asked the monk.

“Last night, around midnight, I lost three coins in bed,” replied Sozan.

(Blais, 1997, p. 97)

“Here,” in *Samsara* (where the monk lives), in space-time, there are only processes that express finite contents, but not the Absolute (the ineffable).

In the “here and now” of the Teacher, time does not exist, therefore nothing is “expressed.” Where there is no time, there are no processes. “Truth” lies in the fact that everything that is expressed in symbols is limited and is virtual reality, rather than Truth. The nonfinite cannot be articulated in words. Everyday consciousness is a dream. One can only look for what has been lost, and one can only lose a thing that “exists” in the virtual world (in the dream). The world as a totality is Truth, which has nowhere to “be lost.” And the “truth” that the monk seeks as a value (the “three coins”) can be lost and found only in the dream.

(53)

Kyozan dreamed that he found himself in Maitreya's Pure Land. He discovered that he was sitting in the Maitreya monastery in the third seat.

Someone announced:

“Preaching today is the person in the third seat.”

After rising and sounding the gavel, Kyozan said:

“The truth of Mahayana's teachings is limitless, beyond thoughts and words.

Is that clear?”

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 142)

If the meaning of the law does not change even in a dream, then how is your dream different from your reality?

(54)

Ummon told the monks:

“The universe is the medicine to cure illness. Tell me, who here is the sick man?”

(Blais, 2001, p. 152)

In other words, is there anyone among those present who has recognized that they are “dreaming” and are ready to wake up?

In his foreword to the book by D.T. Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, C.G. Jung writes that Zen is “practically impossible for the European to appreciate. I will cite examples in this book. . . .

A monk once went to the Master and wanted to learn where the entrance to the path of truth was. The Master asked him: “Do you hear the murmuring of the brook?” “Yes, I hear it,” answered the monk. “There is the entrance,” said the Master.

Formation is in fact the entrance to the truth and the egress from limitedness (“the medicine to cure illness”). As long as you are alive, as long as you are in Formation, you have a chance to wake up.

But before waking up, you must first realize that you are dreaming. This may be realized with the aid of the intellect. But you can escape the limitations only with the aid of creativity.

Fugyuzai, a disciple of Baso, said: “The mind is the Buddha”—this is the healing potion for people who have been poisoned by medicine (Blais, 1997, p. 224).

(55)

“What is the *samadhi* in particle after particle” a monk asked Ummon.

“Rice in the bowl, water in the pail.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 148)

“*Samadhi* in particle after particle” is samsara or Formation, what is “between” Nonbeing and Being. “Rice” and “water”—as substances—are not limited quantitatively, but are limited by external conditions (the “bowl” and the “pail”). As concepts, however, they are inevitably limited *qualitatively* by the laws of semiotics. “Our” mind is not limited in itself, it is limited by our intellect by means of a sign-based system (the first and second signal system according to I.P. Pavlov). The intellect is an external condition, which we regard as our internal essence.



(56)

“Are you a gardener?” Ummon asked a monk.

“Yes.”

“Why do tulips not have roots?”

The monk could not answer.

“Because there is a lot of rain.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 148)

Creativity does not have space-time limitations, and therefore it is pointless to look for creativity in space-time. Our sensory organs create the possibility of space-time localization of the Subject’s reference system. The body is the most universal local form that has been created by Evolution and that is able to implement a broad spectrum of finite contents in the form of processes. For example, the content of a musical work on a record may be implemented as a process if we

put it on a revolving disk and put a needle on it. In some sense an individual is that needle “moving” through time. One can say that the disk (time) is moving, or one can say that the needle (the intellect) is, since motion is relative. It is obvious that outside the record player (outside space-time), the content of the record does not disappear. The content is “given” to the Subject outside of time. It does not unfold as a process, but is presented right away as a whole and always as the present.

A requirement, a need is what limits our perception (and generates Formation itself). In creativity, content is implemented instantaneously (there is no time interval between the need and its fulfillment).

If rain (creativity) “falls continuously,” roots (as the principle of localization and the means of satisfying a need) are not necessary.

(57)

“Teacher, I ask you to deliver me from ignorance and illusions,” a monk asked Ummon.

“What will be the price of rice in Joshu province?”

(Blais, 2001, p. 148)

The disciple is offering himself to the Teacher as an object for deliverance. Therefore, the disciple is limited. Ignorance (a lack of understanding of the reasons for his limitedness) is interpreted by the disciple as a dearth of information.

The disciple identifies himself with his limitations. The ego is a set of needs (and the subprogram instincts corresponding to them) created by Evolution as means of controlling form (the reference system). The ego is a King Midas that turns everything it touches into a value for itself (or a thing). The unified world is “torn asunder” by the intellect into objects—means of satisfying specific limited needs in the given conditions. Thereafter, science faces an endless path of tying everything to everything else, artificially introducing fields and forces that “mediate” the original unity.

The intellect determines the “path” of transition from one (strained) reference system to another, where there is no strain. This process is treated by the intellect as a change over time in the state of the ego (satisfaction of needs) and external conditions (the surroundings in space). The instinct for self-preservation determines the safest path to the goal, which is generated by the intellect and the system of subconscious attitudes. This generated, purely mechanistic “future” is an immutable tautology of limited content. Although this “predictable” future is essentially dead, it is safe.

As long as the instinct for self-preservation works and as long as the individual experiences distress, the intellect formulates questions about the future and looks for safe, predictable paths—the disciple cannot escape from the rut of causality (karma). Creativity is always unpredictable and, consequently, dangerous to the ego. The only information that makes sense for the disciple is the kind that is generated by his needs (for example, “What will be the price of rice in Joshu province?”).

(58)

“Please answer me!” Ummon appealed to Kempo.

“Have you already met with the Old Monk?” Kempo asked.

“I was a little late.”

“Is that so?”

“I always considered myself a thief,” said Ummon, “but you, it turns out, are an absolute bandit!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 149)

The Master (Ummon) is asking an “advanced” disciple to formulate a problem (an answer, a difficulty, a question) on which he is working. Since the disciple already understands the Master’s purpose in asking questions, the question itself can be overlooked (the Master is using this request to nudge the disciple into recognizing a breach of causality).

In reply, the disciple asked a question (which already breaches causality) with which the Master usually greets newly arrived monks, in an effort to understand whether they identify *bodhi* with Buddha (the “Old Monk”). If the monk understands this “meeting” as a symbol of awakening and says that he has already met with him, then this is not merely a delusion but also disingenuousness. A subject cannot meet with himself.

The Teacher always expresses himself indirectly so as, by means of a hint, not to deprive the disciple of an opportunity to experience creativity and to realize his delusions himself. With his reply Ummon is hinting to Kempo that the Old Monk is merely a reference system that once existed in space-time (“I was a little late”). But such a reply also means that the Teacher identified himself here with the same system (the individual) and experiences time as a process, that is, is defined in time and space (is limited).

To put it figuratively, Ummon is a “thief”—one who surreptitiously “takes away” (with hints in the form of koans) limitedness (things) from his disciples. Unexpectedly, however, the disciple with his provocative question, using formal logic,<sup>36</sup> “forcibly drove” Ummon into a corner, and that is already banditry.<sup>37</sup>

With his rejoinder, “Is that so?” Kempo showed that he is no longer a disciple, but someone who has awakened. He understands precisely that this rejoinder is sufficient, and the Master will assess it correctly.

And Ummon, with his exclamation, confirms Kempo’s awakening.

(59)

One day Baso was teaching a monk. Baso drew a circle on the ground and said:

“If you enter the circle, I will hit you! If you do not enter the circle, I will hit you!”

The monk entered the circle, and Baso hit him.

“The Master did not have to beat me,” said the monk.

Baso walked away, leaning on his staff.

(Blais, 2001, p. 181)



To remain in the limited is to await death; for the limited to open into the limitless is death. The boundary is in fact individuality (the ego). The only solution is to destroy the boundary. In order to nudge the disciple toward realization, Baso took on the function of causal predeterminism. The monk focused precisely on this aspect of carrying out the koan and pointed it out to Baso. It was, of course, not necessary to hit the disciple, but then how would he have understood whether his choice was correct? The Master showed the monk by walking away that he was looking at the wrong thing and his help was useless. One needs to look at oneself rather than the Master—he cannot be a focus of the disciple’s wishes. There is nothing to take from him. He can only help the disciple to lose his ego.

(60)

“What is the meaning of Daruma’s coming from the West?” a monk asked Baso.

“At this very instant, what is meaning?”

The monk repeated his question. Baso struck him, and then said:

“If I had not struck you, people would have laughed at me.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 175)

The meaning is revealed in the process of comparing cause and effect, that is, in time. Daruma is totally defined in the present, that is, outside of time. The “present” for Daruma (the awakened one) can be compared in time only to an instant. In this case how can meaning be defined in an instant? By repeating the question, the monk showed his mechanistic “circular motion,” for which he received the blow from the Teacher. Baso goes on to remove responsibility from himself for the blow, logically attributing it to a cause-and-effect relation. In effect, the Master showed that it was not he who struck the monk but the causality in which his disciple got stuck.



(61)

“I would like to know, why does tea seem to taste so good?” Ummon said at tea.

A monk who was present at the tea party asked Ummon to state his opinion.

“Most often the cup has a bottom; a noseless face seems funny,” Ummon replied.

The monk was silent.

“You walk with a crowd and eat rice together with everyone. Continue in the same vein!” Ummon exclaimed.

(Blais, 2001, p. 154)

Evolution created us as a subject’s reference system by means of a need, or more precisely mechanisms, to promote our activity in realizing evolutionary goals. The satisfaction of a need is stimulated with the aid of the “narcotics” produced by the body itself—endogenous morphines (endorphins and enkephalins). This mechanism makes us identify in the world things limited by the goals of Evolution as means of

satisfying a specific need in different conditions. It is the limitedness of the need, and the pleasure we experience from satisfying it with the limited things that stimulate our connection to formation (samsara) and hence our limitedness as well (“the cup has a bottom”—that which brings pleasure can only be limited).

Our acceptance or rejection of something is predetermined by “natural standards” (the narcotic that generates the experiencing of pleasure), and therefore our behavior is mechanistic, dependent on rules and prejudices (“a noseless face seems funny,” but “tea seems to taste so good”). The cause of our reactions may not be recognized, since we identify ourselves with natural needs.

As long as a disciple does not “disidentify himself” with needs, he has nothing to do alongside the Teacher. He is a puppet in the hands of Nature and is standardized, like the whole *crowd*. In his last remark Ummon explicitly refers to needs (social and nutritional) and to the mechanistic limitedness (reproducibility) of the monk’s behavior.

P.S. Only things (the limited) can interact with each other. Koan 55 shows how the limited forms (“the *samadhi* in particle after particle”). One cannot drink tea per se, but one can drink a cup of tea. Only by being limited to a thing can Reality be a means of satisfying a need (generating pleasure). Tea has the capacity to taste good since it is limited to a cup that has a bottom. It is impossible to drink from a cup without a bottom, but it can accommodate everything.

(62)

Once a monk was asked by Kyozan, “Where have you come from?”

The monk replied:

“From Yushu.”

Then Kyozan asked him:

“I’d like to know something interesting about Yushu: what’s the price of rice there?”

(Osho Radzhnish [Rajneesh], 1995, p. 14)

Our needs also limit our interests and our knowledge. Our world is a world of differences: “there” and “here,” “before” and “after,” what is the value of “that” and “this?” By defining himself as finite (limited) and attaching himself to space-time, the monk ties his interests and values (see previous koan) to the finite (needs). Then he should be interested not in satori but in the price of rice (see koan 57).

(63)

“What is the meaning of the words ‘Everyday mind is the Way?’” a monk asked Chosa.

“When you want to sleep, sleep; when you want to sit, sit.”

“Your disciple does not understand.”

“When you are hot, you look for a cool place; when you are cold, you want to warm up.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 211)

Your needs (as the everyday mind interprets them) are the means of realizing evolutionary goals (or the way, Dao). We cannot wish when we want to do so, but we can break the mind's connection to the ego that limits it. Then it will be nobody's Mind.

(64)

Once Tozan exclaimed:

"Now I will settle far from the smoke of human settlements and I will not eat one extra grain of rice. I will receive everyone who comes to me from ten directions, remove their attachments and free them from the shackles of illusion!"

"In body you are no bigger than a coconut, but what a big mouth you have!" said Ummon.

(Blais, 2001, p. 168).

Tozan recognized one of the reasons for his limitedness—the identification with vital needs. This thrilled him, and he decided that this is in fact enlightenment. The Teacher, however, caustically commented on his last, insatiable, socially conditioned wish to become a great "enlightener."

(65)

"The monk Sei said that, when we strike an empty space with a staff, we hear a sound, but when we strike a piece of wood, we do not hear a sound," said Ummon.

With these words Ummon struck the air with a stick and exclaimed:

"Ooh!" And then he struck the floor and asked:

"Do you hear anything?"

"I hear a sound!" a monk replied.

"Blockhead!" exclaimed Ummon, and after striking the floor again, he asked:

"Is that really a sound?"

(Blais, 2001, pp. 157–58)

When we say "Being," according to the laws of semiotics, we are obligated to contrast it with something else, that is, "Nonbeing," "Nothingness," or "Emptiness." But then we assert that Nonbeing is (exists), and therefore it is identical to Being. This is a logical contradiction, and hence the use of these words as terms is incorrect. Therefore, all of the Master's hints are metaphorical and are often formulated as parables. It is impossible to use the finite to express the nonfinite, so in order to overcome the limited, one cannot "attach oneself" to words. It is astonishing how a Master who lived more than a thousand years ago uses words to point to the reasons for limitedness.

When we use the word "emptiness" as a term (with a lowercase letter), we mean it not in an absolute but in a relative sense, as the absence of anything concrete. In this sense, emptiness is a thing and can have its own value. For example, an

architect designs a house (walls and roof) precisely to organize “empty” space. A physical vacuum is also a concrete emptiness; it virtually contains and, under certain conditions, generates any particles. According to cosmologists, our entire Universe was born out of a disturbance in a physical vacuum. Any particle may be regarded from the perspective of quantum mechanics as a wave (“the sound of a vacuum”) or “vacuum resonances.” In effect, our entire world, as a Formation (a transition from Nonbeing to Being) was born from these resonances of Emptiness. The Master does not want the disciples to identify the Emptiness that produced limitless Reality with the emptiness that produced limited things.

Limited emptiness (bells of various sizes) generates specific sensations (sounds of various tones). Limitless emptiness generates the whole world. It is this emptiness on which Ummon’s disciples must focus.

(66)

“The real Emptiness does not destroy things; the real Emptiness is not different from materiality,” said Ummon.

“What is the real Emptiness?” asked a monk.

“Do you hear the sound of a bell?”

“Do you intend to dream until you have reached the year of the donkey?”

(Blais, 2001, p. 155)

In effect, the Master is asking the disciple whether he has recognized the “difference” between “relative emptiness” and absolute Emptiness. After Ummon’s question, “Do you hear the sound of a bell?” the disciple is silent. Let us explain the reason for his silence. An affirmative reply would mean that he hears the sound as a sensation (the finite) and understands that this reply is wrong and that he may be hit with the stick for it. A negative reply would mean that the monk is “deaf” to the Master’s words and does not understand anything. In this case, neither choice of a reply nor the disciple’s silence can be accepted by the Master and show the follower’s limitedness. Ummon rebukes the monk for being lazy: “Do you intend to dream until you die?” You can wake up while you are still in Formation—thereafter it will be too late.

(67)

“The pillars in the temple courtyard have a continuing dialogue with the old Buddhas. Can this be called subjective?” asked Ummon.

The monks were silent.

“When clouds gather over the Southern Mountains, it rains on the Northern Mountains,” Ummon answered himself.

(Blais, 2001, p. 163)

The disciples believe that before Buddha other Buddhas existed. But the limitless is always identical to itself. There is only one total, limitless Reality that is identical to the Subject, which “encompasses” all that is limited. Only things (the limited) can interact with each other. If one assumes that objects (“pillars in the

temple”) can interact with Reality (the Subject), then this process should be called subjective (since only an “object-to-object” relation is objective).

(68)

“He Who is filled with Great Compassion has a thousand hands and in each one is an eye. Which eye is the real one?” Mayoku asked Rinzai.

“He Who is filled with Great Compassion has a thousand hands and in each one is an eye. Which eye is the real one? Answer right now!” exclaimed Rinzai.

Mayoku made Rinzai stand up and sat in his place.

“What does this mean?” asked Rinzai.

Mayoku looked at him as if he wanted to speak, but he could not. Then Rinzai cried “Katz!” pulled Mayoku from his seat and sat down in it himself.

(Blais, 2001, p. 188)

“He Who is filled with Great Compassion” is Buddha or the Subject (the world as a whole). He is “represented” in every possible reference system (“has a thousand hands and in each one is an eye”). The individual, individuality (the ego), is merely the Subject’s reference system (there is a multitude of them). The Master, wishing to help the disciple recognize this himself, takes his seat. Rinzai cannot understand, and in response to his question the Teacher displays a painful effort to say (to manifest himself as the Subject) but cannot, due to the limitedness of the reference system that he has “occupied.” Rinzai, having failed to understand anything, “pushes out” the Subject and returns to “his seat” (to his ego). Rinzai’s dream continues.

(69)

“The Bodhisattva of Great Compassion (Kannon) has so many hands and feet—what does he do with them?”

“He is like a person who tries to find his pillow in the dark,” replied Dogo.

(Blais, 1997, p. 305)

Since an individual regards sensations as signals (signs) of the immediate “external reality” that is inaccessible to him, he uses these signs to grope his way toward constructing a virtual world—a map of “external reality” (a representation of the world beyond the “fence” of sensations) with which he must compare his path toward satisfying needs.

Individuals (“so many hands and feet”), as the local reference systems of a single Subject, construct virtual worlds—mental maps by means of the intellect. Such a “life” in the virtual world (“in the dark”) is like a dream (“to find his pillow” means satisfying a need, i.e., achieving a more comfortable sleep). See also koans 51 and 52.

(70)

“What is the true nature of Buddha Vairocana?” a monk asked Enkan.

“Please give me that bottle.”

The monk gave him the bottle.

“Sit down as you were sitting before,” said Enkan.  
 The monk sat down and after a while asked again:  
 “What is the true nature of Buddha Vairocana?”  
 “The Old Buddha died a long time ago,” came the reply.  
 (Blais, 2001, pp. 201–2)

Enkan commands the monk, making him perform actions that *he*, rather than the monk, needs, and returns him to his old place, from which the same question follows. What interests the monk is merely the place that was vacated a long time ago and to which there is no point in returning. Any limitation generates essentially the same questions. For the monk, the Old Buddha is merely an individual (a reference system) who died long before the monk’s conversation with the Master. As for a living Buddha, the monk does not see him, even though the Buddha is sitting before him.

The true nature of the Buddha is Development through a choice of options. A random choice of a path is not Development but leads to chaos (an increase in entropy). The Subject does not alter the probability of events but merely decides when a certain option will be implemented. This is enough for the chain of events that he needs to be realized, and Evolution had a meaning and direction (for Enkan, not the monk). The Buddha whom the monk understands died a long time ago (abandoned his place and, unlike the monk, will never return to it;<sup>38</sup> see koan 22).

(71)

Rikuko Taifu said to Nansen:

“I have a small stone in my house. Sometimes it moves and has its being, sometimes it lies in place. Can it be carved into a statue of Buddha?”

“Yes it can! Yes it can!”

“Is that true?”

“No it can’t! No it can’t!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 203)

The first question to the Master may be reworded as follows: “Can someone or something awaken me?” Rikuko Taifu refers to himself in the third person (a stone that “moves and has its being”) and understands that it is impossible to wake up through one’s own internal effort. The doubt, however, as to whether you are asleep or are able to wake up (“Is that true?”) makes the awakening itself impossible.

(72)

“How can I get ahold of a jewel in the sky?” a monk asked Nansen.

“Cut down a bamboo, make a ladder, climb it up to the sky, and take your jewel!”

“Is it really possible to put a ladder up to the sky?”

“Is it really possible to doubt that you will get ahold of the jewel?”

(Blais, 2001, p. 208)

The limited cannot destroy its own limitations. Boundaries and the limited itself can be destroyed only by creativity (the limitless)—which is always external to the limited. The Master shows the absurdity of overcoming limitations “from within,” by relying solely on the mechanical intellect. However, an attitude that it is impossible to “attain” this creates an insurmountable obstacle to an awakening (see previous koan). If you believe in your dream that you have died, then you will never wake up.<sup>39</sup>

(73)

Nansen’s cook invited the gardener, also a monk, to have lunch with him, returned home, and began to wait. After a while the gardener arrived. When the cook had filled the dishes with rice, a bird began to sing. The gardener tapped the table. The bird began singing again. He tapped the table again. The bird was silent.

“Do you understand?”

“No,” replied the cook.

The gardener tapped the table.

(Blais, 2001, pp. 209–10)

Our psyche is genetically programmed to associatively connect overlapping events, and the intellect establishes a cause-and-effect relationship between them, committing it to language. The identification of patterns (overlaps) enables the intellect automatically to orient itself in the world and to control the safe satisfaction of needs. As a result, we perceive reality only as external, objective, and causally determined, without understanding the subjective, internal cause of this connecting of sensations with instincts. Any law defines a certain limited content. The totality of conscious limited contents is what limits our domain of consciousness. Since these boundaries are defined by the intellect, the individual perceives it as the source of consciousness. But the intellect has an instinctive nature—it is not even logic, but based more on statistics.

The overlap of the gardener’s tap and the bird’s singing was mechanically tied together by the cook’s intellect as a cause and effect. The breach of the “pattern” bewildered the cook. In order to make the monk understand the situation “from within,” the gardener “replaced” the bird with the cook himself, tapping the table after the cook’s reply and producing new bewilderment. In effect, what is demonstrated here is the entire path and the causes of the appearance of a new object as a sign of a “regular” phenomenon of nature. The gardener made the cook experience all the delusions and logical dead ends of the intellect, and the cook had no choice but to recognize them.



(74)

Joshu said to the monks:

“Clay Buddha cannot cross the river. Iron Buddha cannot cross a crucible.

Wooden Buddha cannot cross through fire.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 215)

When monks refer to and describe Buddha, they reduce him to the definition of an object. The Absolute cannot be identified semiotically.<sup>40</sup> Any description limits it in specific dimensions and turns him into a thing or an idol. This inevitably leads to a contradiction, an example of which is the syllogism: "Can God create a rock that He Himself cannot lift?" It turns out that "omnipotence," too, can limit "almightiness."

(75)

Joshu was asked to come to a Korean temple. When he approached the gate, he asked:

"What temple is this?"

"The Korean one."

"You and I are separated by oceans."

(Blais, 2001, p. 220)

A good koan for adherents of various religions who are ready to go to the gallows for the correct (Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, or other) "localization" (definition or limitation) of God. Any limitation of God is blasphemy in logical terms (see previous koan). A Temple, if it is truly a Temple, cannot be Korean, male, or Buddhist.<sup>41</sup>

(76)

"What is deepest in the world?" a monk asked Dogo.

Dogo rose from his seat, bowed to the monk and said:

"You have come from afar, but I have no answer for you."

(Blais, 2001, p. 102)

The spiritual is not a thing. Being is born from Nothingness, about which there is "nothing" to be said.

(77)

A monk asked Lung-ya:

"What did old Masters attain when they entered the ultimate stage?"

"They were like burglars sneaking into an empty house," came the reply.

(Sendzaki and Mak-Kendzl, 1993, p. 30)

In trying to visualize "Absolute Truth," Nirvana, as a trunk with gems in it or as a paradise, they were no different from a thief who dreams of stealing such a treasure. However, there are no things in the nonfinite, and no differences in unity.

(78)

A monk asked Sozan what is most sacred in the world.

"A dead cat," replied Sozan.

"Why?"

"Because it is priceless to people."

(Blais, 2001, p. 126)

If one looks for the analog to the spiritual "in the world" (in limited Formation), it will be whatever is not a means of satisfying any need (and is therefore



not a value to the ego), that is, it is not caused by anything. So if you look for the spiritual in the world of things, most likely you will find a “dead cat.” For the ego, the spiritual is Nothingness. For limited consciousness, Nirvana can indeed be compared to a “dead cat,” since it is not a means of satisfying pressing needs and is therefore of no value to the ego.

(79)

One day in the temple Joshu saw Bun-en bowing to Buddha. Joshu struck Bun-en with a stick.

“Was I doing something bad when I was paying respects to Buddha?” Bun-en asked.

“It is better not to do good,” came the reply.

(Blais, 2001, p. 220)

Gautama’s statue took the place of Buddha (the Absolute) for the disciple. The disciple reduced attempts to overcome his limitedness to a system of socially approved rituals.<sup>42</sup> We do “good” in order to receive satisfaction of the social need for recognition and approval. In this case, we are merely puppets. This is good for the monk, but does not measure up for a Zen follower.

(80)

Nansen sat down and asked:

“Do you have a teacher?”

“Yes, I do,” replied Joshu.

“Who is your teacher?”

“In early spring it is still quite cold, but I stretch out before the blessed teacher whom I see before me!”

Nansen called Ino, his servant, and told him:

“Find a place somewhere for this monk.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 214)

Joshu attempts to answer (allegorically and vaguely, as he thinks a Zen follower should) that he is still an “unripe” disciple (there are no “fruits” in spring). Since he is prepared to bow to the holy place, his place for the present is not among the Master’s disciples but among the monks.



(81)

Ichu asked Isan to write a *gatha* for him.

“It is foolish to compose a *gatha* in the presence of the requester and even more foolish to write it down on paper!” said Isan.

Then Ichu asked Kyozan to compose a *gatha*. Kyozan drew a circle on paper and next to it wrote: “To think and then to know is second grade. Not to think and to know everything is third grade.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 246)

“Not to think and to know everything” is the same as experiencing inspiration. During this time the individual “loses” his ego and forgets about himself, although he does not recognize himself as creativity. One might say that during this time he loses consciousness and, once he comes to, finds a new content in his consciousness (the “consequence” of insight).

Sometimes a state of creativity is experienced as something external, as if we are guided by some force—then a “split in consciousness” occurs—an outward rejection of creativity, into another reference system. The instinct for self-preservation is an instinct for preserving the ego,<sup>43</sup> or one’s individuality, that which distinguishes one limited reference system from another (since the limitless does not change). These “states” arise spontaneously and do not depend on the individual, but without them he is helpless. A genius is truly to be pitied, since this “experience” may occur only once in a lifetime (as it did for the “genius of one night,” Rouget de Lisle, the author of “La Marseillaise”), or a few times (A.S. Pushkin’s “Boldino Autumn”), and without inspiration a genius (unlike an artisan) is helpless. At the moment, it seems to the individual that he is becoming an instrument of some higher forces, and in this instance he does not recognize his own nature.

Although the absence or splitting of the ego at the moment of insight reduces the rigidity of form, thereby increasing the ability to express new content, the fact that it is limitedness by the preliminary concentration (under the effect of the dominant motive) allows the individual only to “dive” into the abyss rather than merge with it. The instinct for self-preservation always throws him back, albeit with a new “haul.” The result of insight is content that, while complete, is limited by the specific conditions (the the state of the “author” as a form) and that he subsequently recognizes within the bounds of his consciousness and realizes by way of writing, speaking, drawing and other activities.

Insight is experienced as a burst, an instantaneous leap, after which the intellect finds new content in consciousness. The reason is that content cannot change sequentially, like form. It either exists or does not exist. But an instant is not time. To find oneself in an instant (in the present), outside the flow of time, is in fact satori—the “entrance” to Nirvana. This specific feature of creativity also has its reflection in koans.

A monk asked Hogen:

“According to the teaching of the sutras, all things derive from the Impermanent. Where is the Origin of the Impermanent?”

“Form arises from the not-yet-defined; a name arises from the not-yet-mentioned.”

(Blais, 1997, p. 186)

It is the covert, invisible effect of creativity in Formation that prevents the intellect from detecting it. The intellect looks for cause in previous content, and when it fails to find it there, assumes that it is the cause (the source of the new content) itself.

“What is the source of distorted and misleading ideas?”

“Impermanence,” replied Yuima.

“What is the source of impermanence?”

“Impermanence has no source, Manjushri. From this Source of Impermanence things arise.”

(Blais, 1997, p. 186)

Since creativity does not exist in time or space, it does not have a source.

Now we can comment on the koan.

“To think, and then to know” is the path of mechanical, intellectual knowledge. Whatever is produced by this method “smells of grease,” as the ancient Greeks used to say (from handicrafts, rather than inspiration). When the intellect does not achieve insight, however, it is capable by using logic to make its way to the causes of the limitedness of consciousness and of itself. This understanding is the Start of the Path to Awakening. Only with the aid of the intellect, rather than faith, can we recognize that we are dreaming.

“It is foolish to compose a *gatha* in the presence of the requester and even more foolish to write it on paper!” “The presence of the requester” or the existence of a need (goal) limits form and engenders in the creative act a response that may be complete, but is always limited in content. “Even more foolish to write it (the thought) down on paper”—the translation of a thought (state) into a sign—inevitably reduces and additionally limits content. The search for a suitable form (this is already the work of the intellect) and the “anguish of words” related to it are well known to any artist. “A thought uttered is a lie” is a maxim formulated by the poet F. Tyutchev and applied to the search for a match between form and content.

Note that the koan does not even refer to “first grade.” And that is right.

(82)

One day Usek asked An from Seiyin:

“What can be made from this piece of clay?”

“A shapeless Buddha!”

“You have spoiled such a beautiful piece of clay!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 274)

Clay can assume a multitude of geometric shapes, but suffice it to say that this piece of clay is shapeless, and the shape is defined uniquely. Nothing more needs to be made. Definitiveness and uniqueness are “formed” not outside but within you, in words and thoughts. The individual thereby “freezes” his own abilities and his own development.

(83)

“What is Buddha?” asked a monk.

“What here is not Buddha?” replied Fuketsu.

(Blais, 2001, p. 297)

“What” here is not Buddha. The Master is proposing that the monk find a common principle for describing things and see for himself that the monk’s reality only contains things. The very word Buddha (as the Absolute) is illegitimate in language, since it is not a concept, given that the Absolute cannot be compared to anything and it does not differentiate anything. “Say the word ‘Buddha,’ and you wallow in muddy puddles. Say the word ‘Zen,’ and your whole face is red with shame and humiliation” (Hekiganroku).

(84)

Kuei-shan told his monks:

“Winter repeats its cold days every year. Last year was as cold as this one, and next year we will have the same cold weather. Tell me, monks, what days of the year repeat themselves?”

Yang-shan, the senior disciple, walked up to the Teacher and stood so that his right hand covered the fist of his left hand on his chest.

“I knew that you would not be able to answer my question,” said Kuei-shan, and he then turned to his junior disciple, San-yen:

“What will you say?”

“I am sure that I will be able to answer your question,” said Hsiang-yen. He walked up to the teacher and placed his right hand on the fist of his left hand placed on his chest, as the senior disciple had, but Kuei-shan did not pay attention to this.

“I am glad that the elder monk was unable to answer me,” the Teacher remarked.

(Sendzaki and Mak-Kendzl, 1993, pp. 20–21)

Finite content establishes identity between all forms generated by this content. This is a pure tautology. Mechanical circular movement cannot bring about a change in the content itself. The Master is showing this tautological quality of finite content. His question already contains the answer and therefore, in essence, his remarks to his audience are not a question. It makes no sense to respond to it as question. But these are the questions with which Kui-shan’s students come to him.

The elder student reacted to the Teacher’s attention to him with a normal greeting. The younger monk, by expressing confidence that he could answer, showed that he took the Master’s remarks precisely as a question. Having believed that the elder monk’s greeting was the correct answer, he copied his gesture like a monkey.

For his part, the Master, by saying, “I am glad that the elder monk was unable to answer me,” endorsed the elder monk’s behavior and framed the koan for everyone else.

(85)

Ummon told the monks”

“I am not asking what happened before the fifteenth, but tell me, what happened after the fifteenth?”

Responding to himself, Ummon said:

“Every day is a good day.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 160)

Everything that may be said about the future is already the past, since it is substantiated by the intellect on the basis of the past.

See the previous koan.

“If I were emperor, pensively

I would wander the palace corridors.

But my path loops between the pines,

the sea shows blue and a butterfly flutters nearby.

—Miyoshi Tatsuji.



(86)

Baso told a disciple:

“If you have a staff, I will give it to you. If you do not have a staff, I will take it away from you.”

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 162)

This koan may be interpreted as follows: “If you are looking for a support in the world of things, you will get from me only another theory for the intellect or a canon for faith (both are things, mechanical supports for the intellect); if you have overcome your egotism, you will also lose the ego itself (awakening will occur).”<sup>44</sup>

(87)

A Zen master named Gettan lived in the latter part of the Tokugawa era (1603–1867). He used to say:

“There are three kinds of disciples: those who impart Zen to others, those who maintain the temples and shrines, and then there are the rice bags and the clothes-hangers.”

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 93)

They are, respectively: disciples, religious monks, and ignorant laymen (see previous koan).

(88)

Rinzai said, addressing a handpicked audience:

“Sometimes I remove the person and not the thing; sometimes the thing and not the person; sometimes both the person and the thing; and sometimes not the person and not the thing.”

Rinzai is enumerating the possible reference systems of the Subject with which he has to deal.

“What does it mean to remove the person and not the thing?” asked Kokufu, stepping forward.

“When the sun shines, the earth is covered with a brocade; an infant’s hair hangs down to the ground, white as silk,” replied Rinzai.

An immutable mechanistic world without evolution.

“What can one say about removing the thing and not the person?”

“The emperor’s command will be heeded by the whole country; in the smoke of battle the commander-in-chief leaves the fortress.”

At the moment of creativity the ego (the commander-in-chief) “leaves” the reference system (the fortress), and the “evolutionary subject” (the “emperor”) changes its content.<sup>45</sup> This is insight, a creative act or a stage of Evolution.

“What can one say about removing not the thing but the person?”

“When relations are ruptured, we are indeed alone.”

The subject as absolute unity (oneness).

“What can one say when neither the person nor the thing is removed?”

“The emperor ascends to a magnificent throne; old folk songs are heard in the country.”

(Blyth, 2001, pp. 278–79)

Formation.

(89)

“What is the meaning of the statement: ‘Ten-direction Bhagavats, one way to Nirvana’?” Kyosei was asked.

“In a house there are not two masters.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 80)

There is always one subject, and any individuality is only one of the possible reference systems of a subject. Essentially, the Subject is an attribute of the unity of the world.



(90)

When Kuei-shan studied Zen under the supervision of Pai-chang, he worked as a cook at the monastery.

Shu-ma Toi-to came to the monastery to tell Pai-chang that he had found a good place for a monastery on Mount Ta-kuei, so that Pai-chang would choose a new master before the monastery’s foundation was laid.

Pai-chang asked:

“What about me?”

Shu-ma Toi-to replied:

“This mountain is meant for a flourishing monastery. You were born for poverty, so if you live this way, you will have only 500 monks. Could you not find a suitable person among your monks? I think Kuei-shan, the cook, would be good.”

So Pai-chang called Kuei-shan and told him that he must go to establish a monastery.

The abbot heard the conversation and rushed to his Teacher with the words:

“Nobody can say that the cook is better than the abbot.”

Then Pai-chang convened the monks, explained the situation to them and said that whoever correctly answered his question would be a candidate. Pai-chang pointed at a pitcher of water on the floor and asked:

“Without naming it, tell me, what is that?”

The abbot said:

“It cannot be called a wooden sandal.”

Since nobody else answered, Pai-chang turned to Kuei-shan. Kuei-shan stepped forward, kicked over the pitcher, and walked out of the room.

Pai-chang smiled:

“The abbot lost out.”

Kuei-shan became the head of the new monastery, where he lived for many years, schooling more than a thousand monks in Zen.

(Sendzaki and Mak-Kendzl, 1993, pp. 71–73)

A new enterprise always involves additional difficulties and Pai-chang expressed readiness to help in this matter. Shu-ma Toi-to, however (evidently familiar with Zen) calms the master by saying that there are enough resources for the new enterprise and that he would like to take a young abbot to ensure the long-term development of the monastery. The reply is given in a manner so as to “whet the appetites” of those who chose monkhood as a career. The abbot was “taken in” by this. He learned well the lesson that differentiation is a sign of the limited and therefore he could not say that was better than someone else. In order not to give himself away, he formulates his claim in a negative: “*Nobody can say* that the cook is better than the abbot.” Formally this looks like Zen (whoever can say this is in limited consciousness, since only the finite can be compared).

In order to identify a contender, the Master sets up a problem whose point is defined by the situation itself—the choice of a new Teacher. Pointing at the pitcher, he asks that, without naming it, somebody demonstrate what Zen followers should do with this (the limited) (obviously, it is to discard an object-based concept of Reality, “to empty out consciousness”). In other words, what will you teach at the monastery, what will you do? The answer is obvious—to overcome the limitedness of the disciples’ consciousness. The abbot immediately used a well-tested ploy, having decided that the master was playing logical games about nominations with him.

Kuei-shan cast off the “object,” emptied the pitcher and *walked out of the limited*

(the room). This is an old Buddhist analogy. Gautama at one time said that there is no sense in asking questions about the limited if you are in a house where the roof is on fire. You must look for doors in order to get out before the walls collapse.

Many believe that koans are logical competitions of a kind among monks to determine *whose Zen is best* (?). One example is the comments on this koan by the Zen Buddhists Genro and Fugai (1783):

Genro:

Fortunately, Pai-chang placed the pitcher so that the monk was able to overturn it. Let us suppose that I point at the southern mountain and say: "Do not call it," then what will you call it? If you cannot call it a wooden clog, you are in no way better than the abbot. You cannot overturn it the way Kuei-shan overturned the pitcher. So what do you do? Any of you who has true Zen will answer me.

Fugai:

I will kick the Teacher. Even if all the monks were stupid, none of them would say "Wooden clog" while looking at the mountain.

Nyogen:

When Fugai said that he would kick the Teacher, he probably meant both Pai-chang and Genro. If I were in Genro's shoes, I would point at the bamboo broom behind the door and ask the monks to name it without calling it a broom. You cannot call it a trash bin and you cannot kick it. If I were in Fugai's shoes, I would take the broom and sweep the courtyard.

Genro:

Just pick up the pitcher and measure whether it is short or long.

Fugai:

What do you intend to do with it? It has no measure. How can one say whether it is short or long?

Genro:

Thus, without measuring, represent the inner contents.

Fugai:

Look what one foot can do.

Genro:

One kick, and a monastery is established by Kuei-shan. (This foot must grind the emptiness into dust.)

(Sendzaki, 1993, p. 73)

To "kick" the Teacher is, of course, very original. It seems as though they understand koans as crazy acts, and each one wants to do something to become more Catholic than the Pope. A koan is a very specific prompt for a disciple in the difficulty in which he finds himself, as he intellectually examines the reasons for the limitedness of his consciousness, rather than a competition for originality or recklessness.





(91)

Once when Hyakujo was delivering Zen lectures to the monks, an old man attended them, unseen by the monks. At the end of each talk, when the monks left, so did he. But one day he remained after they had gone, and Hyakujo asked him: “Who are you?”

The old man replied: “I am not a human being, but I was a human being when the Kashyapa Buddha preached in this world. I was a Zen master and lived on this mountain. At that time, one of my students asked me whether the enlightened man is subject to the law of causality. I answered him: “The enlightened man is not subject to the law of causality.” For this answer evidencing a clinging to absoluteness, I became a fox for 500 rebirths, and I am still a fox. Will you save me from this condition with your Zen words and let me get out of a fox’s body? Now may I ask you: Is the enlightened man subject to the law of causality?”

Hyakujo said: “The enlightened man is one with the law of causality.”

At the words of Hyakujo the old man was enlightened. “I am emancipated,” he said, paying homage with a deep bow. “I am no more a fox, but I have to leave my body in my dwelling place behind this mountain. Please perform my funeral as a monk.”

The next day Hyakujo gave an order through the chief monk to prepare to attend the funeral of a monk.

“But no one was sick in the infirmary,” wondered the monks. “Whom does our teacher mean?”

After dinner Hyakujo led the monks out and around the mountain. In a cave, with his staff he poked out the corpse of an old fox and then performed the ceremony of cremation.

That evening Hyakujo gave a talk to the monks and told this story about the law of causality.

Obaku, upon hearing this story, asked Hyakujo: “I understand that a long time ago because a certain person gave a wrong Zen answer he became a fox for 500 rebirths. Now I want to ask: If some modern master is asked many questions, and he always gives the right answer, what will become of him?”

Hyakujo said: “You come here near me and I will tell you.”

Obaku went near Hyakujo and slapped the teacher’s face with this hand, for he knew this was the answer his teacher intended to give him.

Hyakujo clapped his hands and laughed at the discernment. “I thought a Persian had a red beard,” he said, “and now I know a Persian who has a red beard.”

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 114)

The monks believe that a wrong choice is the reason that they remain in the limitations of Samsara,<sup>46</sup> and a right choice will guarantee them Nirvana. In the context of formal logic, however, everything that is already predetermined is

essentially in the past (it does not go beyond the bounds of limited content). Only creativity, by breaching the cause-and-effect relationship, is capable of extracting the disciple from the mechanically determined vicious circle of “the eternal past.” It is impossible to achieve satori “from within” (from limited consciousness). “From within,” it is possible only to increase the likelihood of insight. The question, “Is the enlightened man subject to the law of causality?” means that the questioner is comparing causality to the Absolute, to which nothing can be compared, that is, he is thinking of the Absolute as a reference system. The “teacher’s” answer, “The enlightened man is not subject to the law of causality,” indicates that he too is comparing the Absolute to causality, that is, he is limiting the Absolute.

It is not at all the false choice that doomed the old man to the long “journey” of a hamster in a wheel (samsara) but the fact that he has not yet recognized his limitedness in Formation (i.e., the cause is still in the future) and, in essence, he has no choice. The actual “punishment” was not the fact that he was deprived of Zen (he merely had the illusion that he had achieved *Bodhi*) but the fact that he is still in samsara. He realized his limitedness when he tried to determine its cause logically, that is, to determine it mechanically by means of denial. It is obvious that any choice he makes that derives from the clear-cut rules of formal logic leaves him within the framework of the same logic that is limited by rigid laws. The question is not *what* he must answer but to be ready to understand the answer, which must come to him from outside (actually, this answer always exists). It is not his correct answer but the recognition of the Teacher’s answer to a question posed long ago that emancipated the monk. The parable is constructed with absolute precision: the old man understands that emancipation can come only “from without” and only when he is *ready for it* (see koan 23). This is why he asks for it from the Master (total creativity) and does not try to answer himself.

Obaku’s question, “If some modern master is asked many questions, and he always gives the right answer, what will become of him?” shows that Obaku assumes that if a disciple (or a master with a small “m”<sup>47</sup>) gives correct answers for a long time, this will be the cause of satori (see koan 32). The Absolute (satori) is thereby confined to the finite. This is the same mistake that the old man made. When the Master asks him to come closer, Obaku, realizing that he will inevitably receive a predetermined blow, “preempts” the Master and strikes a blow himself. But this formally logical anticipation does not take him out of the mechanistic nature of the “eternal past.” The fact that he struck Hyakujo, rather than Hyakujo him, did not make the actual predetermined nature of the blow (as a marker of lack of knowledge) disappear (see koan 60). He simply took up this task himself. The permutation of addends does not change the sum.<sup>48</sup> Obaku, having not accepted the Teacher’s answer, immediately repeated the stupidity of the monk from the parable, and continued to run “in the wheel” of samsara.

It is amusing that, instead of receiving a blow from the Master and pondering his question, the disciple accepts his predeterminedness. Effectively rejecting

the not-yet-stated “prompt” from the Teacher, he publicly makes, through his “answer,”<sup>49</sup> a choice in favor of limitedness and demonstrates his formal “future,” which in essence is tautologically confined to the past. Astonishingly, the situation in the Master’s parable occurs in real life with his disciple. The “transformation” of the disciple into a fox took place precisely as a result of his blow. Obaku even preempted the situation of posing the question of a choice.

How was Hyakujo supposed to have reacted to the “noncommissioned officer’s widow,” who in order to avoid a flogging publicly “whipped herself beforehand?”\* Only with laughter.



(92)

Nansen found two monks from the northern and southern halls of the monastery fighting over a cat. Seizing the cat, he shouted at the monks:

“If either of you says a good word, you will save it.”

No one answered him, and Nansen boldly cut the cat in two.

That evening Joshu returned, and Nansen told him what had happened. Joshu removed his sandals, put them on his head and walked out.

“If you had been here, you would have saved the cat,” said Nansen.

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 129)

The Bible tells the story of Solomon’s Judgment:

Later, two women who were prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. The one woman said, “Please, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth while she was in the house. Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. We were together; there was no one else with us in the house, only the two of us were in the house. Then this woman’s son died in the night, because she lay on him. She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your servant slept. She laid him at her breast, and laid her dead son at my breast. When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, I saw that he was dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, clearly it was not the son I had borne.” But the other woman said, “No, the living son is mine, and the dead son is yours.” The first said, “No, the dead son is yours, and the living son is mine.” So they argued before the king. Then the king said, “The one says, ‘This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead’; while the other says, ‘Not so! Your son is dead, and my son is the living one.’” So the king said, “Bring me a sword,” and they brought a sword before the king. The king said, “Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one, and half to the other.” But the woman whose son was alive said to the king—because compassion for her son burned within her—“Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!” The other said, “It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it.” Then the king responded: “Give the first woman the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother.” (1 Kings 3:16–28)

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\*A reference to a character in Gogol’s play *The Inspector General*.—Trans.

If ownership is claimed on a living being, it is thereby regarded as a thing. It turns out to be permissible even to cut a child in two. Logically the intellect has already turned the living into a dead thing.

The Master's work with his disciples lies in emancipating the living, even at the cost of their lives. Zen disciples used to make a promise not to give up their intention to achieve awakening—absolute emancipation—even if the Teacher has to kill them. As Confucius said: "If a man hears the Way in the morning, he may die in the evening without regret." Death disappears for a follower at the moment *satori* is attained.

The Teacher, in effect, released the cat from its transformation into a dead thing when the monks made their claims on it. Neither of them was able to overcome his ego, and Nansen, while emancipating a living being, was unable to save its life. This story places everything upside down. It is unsurprising that when Joshu heard it, he "removed his sandals, put them on his head." The Master, like Solomon, demonstrated what inevitably comes from perceiving the world through the prism of one's ego—it kills life, and only a renunciation of the ego brings about awakening.<sup>50</sup>

It is the monks who killed the cat, and the Teacher who saved it.

P.S.

The Buddhist monk Mumon (1183–1260) commented on this koan as follows:

"Had Joshu been there

He would have enforced the edict oppositely.

Joshu snatches the sword

And Nansen begs for his life."

It is, after all, hard to walk on one's head, judging from Mumon's verse.

The following story provides a good illustration of the conditionality of ownership.

(93)

The Zen Master Hakuin was well known in the prefecture for his exemplary life. Not far from him lived a beautiful girl whose parents owned a food store. One day, without any warning, her parents discovered she was pregnant.

This made her parents very angry. Their daughter at first would not name the father of the future baby, but after growing tired of the interrogations, she finally named Hakuin. In great anger the parents went to the master.

"Is that so?" was all he would say.

After the child was born it was brought to Hakuin. By this time the master had lost his reputation, which did not trouble him. But he took very good care of the child. He obtained milk from his neighbors and everything else the child needed.

A year later the young mother admitted to her parents that the child's father was a young man who worked in the fish market. The mother and father of the girl at once went to Hakuin to beg for forgiveness. They apologized at length, and asked for the child back.

Hakuin heeded their requests. When he returned the child, he said only: “Is that so?”

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 11)

In this koan the girl’s parents, in effect, associate the child with a thing, applying the labels “yours” and “not yours” according to formal criteria. But after all, the child is a living being and is therefore free by definition. When another man’s paternity is *formally* confirmed, the ownership of the child, as a thing, changed. But this ownership, which is conditioned on formal rules, is an external attribute, whereas the child remained the same as before. In other words, ownership is determined by the intellect, not by nature. It is not hard to comprehend what “sacred ownership” is in essence (see koan 78).

(94)

Goso said:

“When a buffalo goes out of his enclosure to the edge of the abyss, his horns, head, and hooves all pass through, but why can’t his tail pass through?”

(Blais, 1997, p. 242)

What prevents a disciple (the “buffalo”) from “attaining” the limitless, why can’t he even get out of his “cage,” not to mention reach the “edge of the bottomless abyss” (satori)? Disciples try to move toward the “source” of creativity from the finite. They imagine attainment of satori as a movement in space-time (in Formation). In this regard, as pupils, they are engaged solely in tautology (studies) and cannot get out of the limited content of abstract knowledge. They understand movement as a succession of finite states. But that which is worthwhile is outside of movement. The buffalo, in a state of “going out,” cannot alter his state of “going out” in any amount of time, otherwise he will have “gone out.” Paraphrasing Zeno’s famous aporia, one can say: before half of the buffalo’s tail can go out, a quarter of the tail must go out, and before a quarter goes out, an eighth must go out, and so forth. The number of intermediate states that define movement is infinite, and the finite cannot be exhausted by this method. In order to pass through every state a follower must “be” (be located) in each of them for at least some time. Then any movement that is conceptualized in this fashion cannot even begin, let alone be completed in a finite time span.

(95)

Two monks were arguing about the flag. One said:

“The flag is moving.”

The other:

“The wind is moving.”

The sixth patriarch was walking by. He said:

“Neither the flag nor the wind; the mind is moving.”

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 147)

Movement as defined by the intellect is contradictory, and therefore it is absurd or, as the Buddhists say, it is an illusion generated by the limited mind (see previous koan). If you view a line from the end of it, you will see a point. If the position of the reference system in subject-based space (see “The Psychology of Creativity”) is changed, it will look like a line. From within subjective reality, a change in the position of a reference system in subject-based space is interpreted by the intellect as movement. Since the ego identifies all changes in the position of a reference system in subject-based space with oneself, it “regards” itself as immutable and the world as changing.

Look intently at the circle in the center of Figure 1. Does the pattern on it seem to be moving from side to side? Without taking your gaze from the center of the circle, move your head a bit. Is there an illusion that the pattern around the sphere is moving?

(96)

Sozan came to Tozan to say goodbye.

“Where are you going?” Tozan asked.

“Where there are no changes.”

“How can you go there?”

“Going in itself is immutable.”

(Blais, 2001, pp. 123–24)

“Going” is a state from which there is “no egress” (see previous koan).

(97)

Shogen asked:

“Why can’t a strong man lift his leg?”

(Blais, 1997, p. 156)

The reason is the same as in koan 94 [correctly, 74—Trans.]. (Even Almighty God cannot create a rock that He Himself cannot lift.)

(98)

Kanyu visited Daiten<sup>51</sup> and asked him:

“How many springs and autumns have you seen?”

Daiten lifted his rosary and asked:

“Do you understand?”

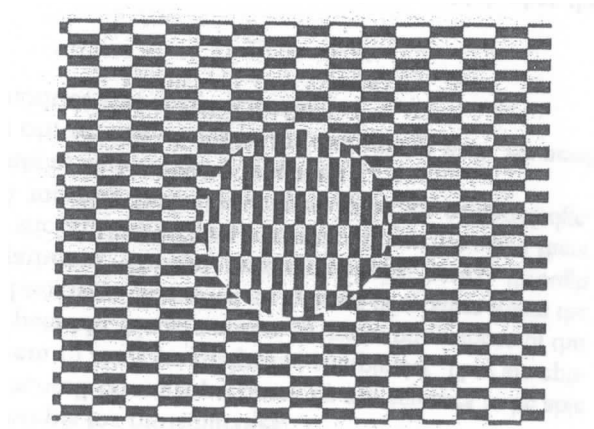
“No.”

“Both day and night there are 108 beads on it.”

(Blais, 2001, pp. 39–40)

The mode of existence of content in space-time is a process—an ordered sequence of forms that express a certain relation or law. Obviously, changes can be registered only in relation to something finite (limited). To speak of a change in the limitless is absurd: it is always identical to itself.

In identifying the body, personality and individuality of the Master (as a finite

Figure 1. **The Ouch Illusion**

reference system) with the creativity that is manifested through these forms, Kanyu does not understand that creativity (Daiten) can be limited in time, because Kanyu sees the Master as a body that has a date of birth. The Master is always in the present and time is external to him. He does not experience it as a limited sequence of events causally linked by the intellect. For him, time is given *as a whole*.

Monks usually sequentially finger their rosaries, counting off some events (the number of prayers and so forth). For them any content exists, is defined, and is realized only in space-time as a process. This is the perception of reality through the “prism” of the intellect, which mechanically orders the world into a sequence, a regular temporal process of a change in form that expresses a certain finite content. Creativity alters the content itself as a whole and therefore cannot exist in time. It is always realized instantaneously as insight. The Master perceives not a sequence but a whole (*all 108 beads at any instant*).

(99)

One day Pai-chang was walking with Ma-tsu along the road and heard geese honking in the sky. Ma-tsu asked:

“What is that?”

Pai-chang replied:

“Those are wild geese honking.”

After a while Ma-tsu asked:

“Where are they flying to?”

Pai-chang replied:

“They already flew away.”

Ma-tsu turned and twisted Pai-chang’s nose. Pai-chang cried out in pain, and Ma-tsu said:

“And you still say they have already flown away!”

(Nesterkin, 1990, p. 41)

The present as defined by the intellect is essentially a certain time interval that has a “beginning” (the cause of a certain state) in the past and an “end” in the future. This is also reflected in speech such as when we assign to the present the entire process of some action, for example: “I *am* making a jump” (compare: “And you *still* say they have *already* flown away”). Our memory is, in effect, an instrument with which we can experience the past in the current form of the present. Similarly, a conceptualization is the current experiencing of an intellectually modeled future in the present. However, the present, as an instant, has no duration and in essence is not time. True (“actual”) reality “exists” (or more precisely, coincides) with the present (in the meaning of “extratemporal”). Since time, as the intellectual ordering of forms within the framework of a certain content, and sensation itself, as an elementary characteristic of a certain process, give rise to a sign-based perception limited by the intellect, the disciple should have recognized them as the factors limiting his consciousness.

(100)

Another time a monk asked Roso:

“What is meant by the expression: ‘right in front of your nose’?”

Roso responded:

“Slender bamboo cannot be used for musical instruments; a gourd cannot go back to the trellis where it grew.”

(Osho Radzhnish, 1995, p. 263)

Both the past and the unpredictable future are included in the limited samsara. Only the present, as an instant, as the absence of time, as Nothingness, is the “entrance” to Nirvana, which is “always in front of your nose.” The present is what is *always* “in front of your nose.” “Slender bamboo” may be used to make a flute only in the future (when it grows). A ripe gourd that has been ripped off “cannot go back to the trellis” (that is already the past). But the past and future are an arbitrary division of actual Reality (see koan 98). Note that the Master deliberately does not use the concept of the present, since it is identical to the Absolute. The disciple is given the opportunity to recognize the past and future as different forms of “his” present and to thereby experience satori.

One Master whom a disciple tormented with questions about how to meditate correctly said: “Have you noticed that between two thoughts there is an instant without thought?” “Yes,” replied the disciple. “Find your way there!” said the Master.

(101)

“What is eternity?” Hogen was asked.

“This very instant.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 880)

An instant has no duration, it is outside of time.

See the commentary to the previous koan.



(102)

“I know the meaning of the Twelve-Division Canon, but what is the meaning of Daruma’s coming from the West?” a monk asked Mayoku.

Mayoku stood up, picked up his staff, turned and lifted his leg.

“Do you understand?” he asked.

The monk did not answer. Mayoku struck him.

(Blais, 2001, p. 186)

Mayoku’s absurd behavior is an answer to the monk’s absurd question, but the behavior does not have meaning. This is what the monk should have understood in regard to the cause of his failure to understand creativity. The real meaning of an individual’s behavior is revealed in comparison with the motivation, the goal, the need, that is, within the bounds of the ego. But Daruma has no ego, therefore, the question regarding the meaning of his behavior is nonsensical (see also koan 73). One can speak of cause only while in the monk’s limited reference system (and from that system).

(103)

“Is the meaning of Daruma’s coming from the West contained in the Sacred Writings?” a monk asked Sekiso.

“Yes.”

“What is that meaning?”

“Do not look for it in the sutras!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 104)

Creativity cannot be expressed in concepts (of the sutra), but one can bring one’s own, always limited meaning into anything.

(104)

Another time Kyozan was washing his clothes and Tangen asked him:

“What should we do at this moment?”

Kyozan replied:

“Where shall we look at this moment?”

(Osho Radzhnish, 1995, p. 15)

The Mumonkan tells a story about Gutei.

Whatever question he was asked about where the Path, *Bodhi*, or Buddha is, Gutei would raise his finger. Any goal is a vector quantity. It is always oriented toward a thing (or a situation) as a means of satisfying our need; it is always based on something we require. The realization of the ultimate goal is death.<sup>52</sup> An escape from causality is not a thing. In order not to say the word “Buddha,” which is illegitimate in the language, he simply raised his finger, which did not point anywhere,<sup>53</sup> but he could point it anywhere at all (at everything). His boy attendant, imitating the Teacher, also raised his finger in response to questions about Buddha. One day the Master saw this and immediately cut off the disciple’s finger with a knife. As

the disciple ran off screaming, Gutei called after him and asked: "Where is the Path?" The boy raised his finger and suddenly "awakened."

When the boy attendant imitated the Teacher, his ego was "supplanted" by Gutei, and here it turned out that Gutei was standing in front of him. When he "raised" his finger, he saw his finger lying in front of him in dust. Stress prevented the intellect from stepping in and the disciple suddenly recognized clearly that "he" is not his ego, not his body, and not his intellect. An instantaneous disidentification with the limited had occurred.

Now about the koan. The Master is always in the present, while a goal is defined as a direction toward achieving satisfaction of a need. The satisfaction of a need is a "movement" from a cause (an already existing need, i.e., the past) to a specific effect (a state of satisfaction of the need), which is still in the future. A causally dependent body should not be identified with the Master (creativity). At this eternal moment there is nowhere to look, since there is no need in it, no time and no space.

(105)

Tokusan was studying Zen under Ryutan. One night he came to Ryutan and asked questions for a long time.

Ryutan told him:

"It is already quite late. Why don't you retire?"

So Tokusan bowed and opened the outside door to go out, observing:

"It is very dark outside."

Ryutan offered Tokusan a lighted candle to find his way. Just as Tokusan received it, Ryutan blew it out. At that moment, the mind of Tokusan was opened.

"What have you attained?" asked Ryutan.

"From now on," said Tokusan, "I will not doubt the teacher's words."

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 145)

Students often became immersed in abstract scholastic discussions about the Master's clues, without understanding the overt and explicit orientation of the koan toward their immediate reality. Ryutan, wishing to return Tokusan from an abstract, speculative understanding of the words to reality, cuts off the conversation with the words: "It is already quite late." When Tokusan opens the outside door, he immediately exclaims: "It is very dark outside!" The Master by blowing out the candle, literally "pushes" him out of the abstract into the real. The disciple in reality plunges into the darkness about which the Teacher was just speaking to him and that was nevertheless so surprising. The Master is not engaging in scholasticism, his actions are aimed at making the disciple directly aware of his own reality and himself.



(106)

Goso asked a monk: "When Sei's soul separated from her body, where did the real person end up?"

(Blais, 1997, p. 230)

The story of Sei's two personalities is included in many Chinese short stories about ghosts. There are several versions of this story, but they do not vary much. The best-known version is part of *Chien-teng Hsin-hua*—a collection of stories by Qu Yu (Ch'ü Yu), published in four volumes during the Ming dynasty. It appeared in Japan during the Tokugawa period and had a notable effect on the literature of that time.

In a village called Koyo lived a man by the name of Chokan, whose younger daughter Sei was a true beauty and the apple of her father's eye. She had a male cousin named Ochu, and one day Chokan said in jest that they would make a fine married couple. The young people took him seriously and since they loved each other they decided that they were already betrothed. The father, however, decided to marry off Sei to another young man, Hinryo, and tragedy seemed unavoidable. Unable to do anything, Ochu left the village on a boat, but one evening, after several days' journey, to his great astonishment, he found that Sei was on the same boat. The sweethearts were overjoyed and set off for the country of Shoku, where they lived for several years, giving birth to two children. Sei, however, could not forget her homeland and said that she had abandoned her father against his will and wanted to know what he now thought of her. So Ochu decided to return with his wife to his village. When they arrived at the house of Sei's father, Ochu apologized that he had taken his daughter away without permission, and asked for his forgiveness.

"What is the matter?!" the father exclaimed. "Who are you talking about?"

"It is Sei," replied Ochu.

"Not so! That is not Sei!" exclaimed the father. "Sei became ill and has been in bed for several years already."

Ochu returned to the boat, where Sei was waiting for him, and brought her to her father's house. When the Sei who was lying in bed was told of this, she arose, went toward the Sei from the boat, and the two women at that moment became one. Chokan said that after Ochu left, his daughter never spoke, and lay unconscious in her room. Her soul seemed to have left her body. Sei said that she had not known that her body had remained in her father's house. She had only felt love for Ochu, and when she learned that he had left, she followed him, as if in a dream. She remembered nothing more.

A personality is a totality of vital reflexes and social attitude, whose content may turn out to be contradictory and not compatible in some conditions. The koan underscores this external causality of the mechanical structure. A "clash" occurred between two contradictory reflexes (based on Pavlov). In the legend, in order to resolve this contradiction, Sei's personality "splits." A mechanistic definition of the Subject (as well as life) is impossible.

(107)

One day, while tilling the field, Shiko cut a worm in two.

"I just cut a worm in two," he told the monks. "Both parts are continuing to move. Which of them contains the life of the worm?"

(Blais, 2001, pp. 210–11)

See previous koan. Compare with the Schrödinger's Cat Paradox.



(108)

Tanzan and Ekido were once walking down a muddy road. A heavy rain was falling. As they came around a bend, they met a lovely girl in a silk kimono and sash, unable to cross the soaked road. Tanzan, saying "Come on, girl," lifted her in his arms and carried her over the mud.

Ekido did not speak the rest of the way and did not resume the conversation until evening, when they had reached a temple where they stopped for the night. Then he could no longer restrain himself and said:

"We monks must not go near females, especially such young and lovely ones. It is dangerous. Why did you do that?"

"I left the girl there," said Tanzan. "Are you still carrying her?"

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 24)

It is not prohibitions, limitations, or the performance of a ritual but real freedom from one's instincts and social prejudices that brings emancipation.

(109)

There was an old woman in China who had supported a monk for over twenty years. She had built a hut for him, and she fed him while he was meditating. Eventually she wanted to find out what progress he had made.

She enlisted the help of a girl who seemed very passionate to her.

"Go and embrace him," she said, "and then ask him suddenly, 'What now?'"

The girl went to see the monk. After caressing him for a while, she asked him what he was going to do about it.

"An old tree grows alone on a cold rock," the monk replied poetically. "There is no warmth anywhere here."

The girl returned and related what she had heard.

"Just think of it! For twenty years I fed that fellow!" the old woman exclaimed angrily. "Yet he not only did not respond to your passion, but did not even show any compassion."

She went to the monk's hut at once and burned it down.

(Mumon et al., 2000, pp. 13–14)

In the previous koan the monk carried a girl across a stream, while the monk in this koan did not even express compassion to her, performing an ascetic ritual.

(110)

Two monks were walking; it began to rain; one monk got wet, the other didn't.

(Blais, 1997, p. 276)

The body, rather than the monk, can get wet. Hence the conclusion: one of the "monks" is nothing more than a body or a limited "thing."

(111)

The temple of the Zen master Kanzan needed repairs . . . One day, when it was raining and the roof was leaking, Kanzan called two attendants and told them to put something where the water was dripping from the ceiling onto the floor. One of them ran off and immediately returned with a bamboo basket, which made the master very happy, and he harshly scolded the second monk, who spent a long time looking for a more suitable vessel for the water.

(Blais, 1997, p. 272)

The Master is testing what causes the disciples' behavior—his specific instructions (see koan 105) or the disciples' needs (or the monks' concepts of the Master as an individuality). The Master is not ordering the disciples like servants. If his body requires something, he will do it himself (see koan 104).

The monks came to the Teacher so as to escape Samsara or the “burning house” (in Gautama's phrase) before it collapses, while the second monk here as well tries to make himself a little more comfortable, having been “impaled” (Samsara is a “place of suffering,” according to Buddhism).

All these koans indicate that the path to awakening is not religious asceticism and the suppression of vital needs but a recognition of them as external to oneself.

(112)

One day Tinsho was serving a monk, feeding him rice with his own hands. When the monk stretched out his hands to take the cup from Tinsho's hands, Tinsho retreated a step. The monk was silent. Tinsho said:

“I have the same in mind.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 270)

In this case, the monk cannot rupture his identification with the reference system and similarly replaces the Master (who is trying to help him in this regard) with a limited individual. The Teacher used the analogy of physical nourishment, which he can provide, with spiritual “nourishment,” which the monk conceptualized as a thing. Indeed, why can a Monk not receive from the Teacher absolute Truth in the same manner as he receives rice from his hands? In reality, the Master not only cannot provide anything but also “takes away” the disciple's ego, his needs, and hence his notion of the world as a thing (the rice, as a means of satiating hunger).

(113)

Ananda told Kashyapa:

“Buddha gave you the gold-brocaded robe of succession. What else did he give you?”

“Ananda,” said Kashyapa.

“Yes, brother,” Ananda replied.

“Now you can take down my preaching sign and put up your own,” said Kashyapa.

(Mumon et al., 2000, p. 138)

Buddha has nothing to give the disciple, he can only take away his ego (see previous koan). Judging by his remarks, Ananda perceives Kashyapa as an individual (an ego), but that is precisely what Buddha “took away” from “Kashyapa,” and he is beyond the boundaries of the sign-based system (“You can take down my preaching sign”) and system of values. In effect Ananda is asking what knowledge (valuable information) Buddha gave him besides the “gold-brocaded” garb.

(114)

“After a hundred years, if someone asks about the absolute meaning of the universe, what shall I say to him?” Sekiso asked Dogo.

Dogo called the boy attendant, who came, and told him to fill the water pitcher. Dogo waited a while, and then asked Sekiso:

“What was it you asked just now?”

Sekiso repeated the question. Without a word, Dogo went back to his room.

(Blais, 2001, p. 103)

It is impossible to “place” limitless content in a limited form (or: a limited form cannot express limitless content). And for Sekiso the universe is limited, like a pitcher that can be filled.



(115)

Mayoku came to Shokei carrying his bell staff with him. He walked around Shokei’s seat three times, shook his staff, ringing the bells, stuck it in the ground, and stood up straight.

Shokei said:

“Good.”

Mayoku then came to Nansen. He walked around Nansen’s seat three times, shook his staff, ringing the bells, stuck it in the ground, and stood up straight.

Nansen said:

“Wrong.”

Mayoku said:

“But Shokei said, ‘Good’; why do you say, ‘Wrong’?”

Nansen said:

“Shokei is ‘good,’ but you are wrong. You are blown about by the wind. That will lead to destruction.”

(Osho Radzhnish, 1995, pp. 150–51)

Zen was often perceived by followers as a kind of “mad” ritual for the “initiated.” Then monks began to compete to see who could “pull off” something especially “nonsensical” or “absurd” (see the commentary on koan 90).

Mayoku, inventing a symbolically absurdist ritual, began to walk around the masters for confirmation of his understanding of Zen. When he staged his show for Shokei, the latter had nothing to say about the performance. Well, he expressed his state of the absurd, to which Shokei, out of courtesy, expressed his state in

response—“good” (evidently the sun was beating down and birds were singing). Obviously, “good” cannot be a school grade for the Absolute, but the elated Mayoku rushed to get another “confirmation” of his Zen from another Master.

Nansen realized that Mayoku has become so “paralyzed” that he could not even discern prompts, and therefore openly refers to his stupidity.

(116)

“What can be higher than the teaching of the Buddha’s and the Patriarchs?” asked a monk.

Bokuju, without thinking about it, raised his staff and said:

“I call this a stick. What do you call it?”

The monk was silent. Then Bokuju raised his staff again and asked:

“What can be higher than the Buddhas and the Patriarchs? Was that not what you asked me?”

The monk remained silent.

(Blais, 1997, pp. 127–28)

A difference is defined only in relation to the finite. If the monk conceptualizes Buddha this way (as *something*), then indeed the stick above the head of the Teacher (the awakened one) is technically higher than Buddha.

(117)

“What is Buddha?” asked a monk.

“A bamboo broom in the Jorin temple,” replied Fuketsu.

(Blais, 2001, p. 296)

The Teacher is trying to show the monk by his exaggeratedly concrete reply that to look anywhere for the Absolute as a “sacred” thing is absurd. Any object in a “sacred” place must then be sacred, and in this sense there is no difference between a statue of an idol and a broom. Awakening is not a ritual, and it cannot be asked for as a thing from a wooden or golden statue in a temple. It is the same as worshipping a broom in a temple—the effect will be no better.

(118)

Saigun once entered a temple and noticed a sparrow making droppings on the head of an image of Buddha. Saigun asked Nyoe, a disciple of Ma Tzu:

“Has the sparrow the Buddha-nature or not?”

Nyoe answered:

“Yes!”

Saigun asked:

“Then why does it make droppings on the head of Buddha?”

Nyoe replied:

“Does it make droppings on the head of a hawk?”

(Osho Radzhnish, 1995, p. 26)

The most “original” commentaries and explanations of koans may be found in

the writings of Osho Rajneesh. The commentary on this koan is especially stunning: “Buddha is sitting so silently; it is possible for the sparrow to shit on the Buddha. It is his silence, it is his utter immobility . . . It is possible for a sparrow to mount on the head of a Buddha, but it is not possible to make droppings on the head of a hawk. The hawk moves the fastest of all the birds” (Osho Radzhnish, 1995, pp. 280–81 [translation from [www.oshorajneesh.com/download/osho-books/zen/Zen\\_The\\_Mystery\\_and\\_The\\_Poetry\\_of\\_the\\_Beyond.pdf](http://www.oshorajneesh.com/download/osho-books/zen/Zen_The_Mystery_and_The_Poetry_of_the_Beyond.pdf)]).

A vivid picture is immediately conjured up of a sparrow chasing a hawk in order to “shit” on its head. However, “the hawk moves the fastest of all the birds” and the wretched sparrow, in despair, defecates on the head of Buddha, which is frozen in the blessed “meditation” of a stone idol.

This koan deals with the same problem as the previous one.



(119)

“What does your school teach?” a monk asked Joshu.

“Though the folding screen is broken, the frame is still there.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 218)

If the intellect ceases to construct a sign-based (mediated) conceptualization of the world in consciousness, then what is “presented” to the Subject from this temporary reference system (the “folding screen”) is true Reality rather than a mental map.

(120)

Another monk asked the same question.

“Ask in a loud voice, I am hard of hearing,” said Joshu.

The monk repeated the question in a loud voice.

“You ask about my teaching. I know your teaching.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 219)

Followers believe that each Zen school teaches something special. But Zen “does not have” distinctions. It is possible in different forms (for example, in a quiet or loud voice) to ask the same ultimate question about the Absolute, which does not change it. Quantitative (finite) distinctions do not matter here; in effect it is the same question. Followers assume that it is possible in the context of formal logic to ask the “correct” question about the Absolute (what or who is this?), to which it is possible in the context of the same formal logic to receive a complete answer. The intellect itself and conceptual thinking are merely methods of understanding the world. Since any method has its limitations, it can be appropriate only within these limitations. Joshu says that he knows what the limitation of everyday consciousness is (“I know your teaching”) and the only thing he can teach (“You ask about my teaching”) is an explanation of the absurdity of applying this method (“your teaching”) to an understanding of the world as a limitless whole. In order to attain satori, it is necessary to



discard inappropriate tools. Joshu's "teaching" (wisdom) that he knows the causes of the monk's limitedness is a formal knowledge (teaching) of the latter that is directly tied to the limitedness of the ego ("my" or "your" teaching).

(121)

"Explain the truth to me without words," the monk asked.

"I recently lost my hearing," replied Joshu.

The monk walked around Joshu once and said:

"Please explain to me!"

Joshu stood up, walked around his seat once and said:

"One hundred thousand Buddhas came out from this gate."

"What is a gate of one hundred thousand Buddhas?" asked the monk.

Joshu struck him.

(Blais, 2001, p. 221)

The monk already understands that it is impossible to answer a question about the Absolute using limited concepts, but he wants very much to get an answer, even in a different form. Joshu, with his remark ("I lost my hearing"), prods the monk to back away then even from a verbal formulation of the question itself. The monk walks around Joshu, thinking that he is thereby walking around (limiting in space) the Absolute or the unified Subject (Buddha) and asks for an explanation of the contradiction. With his reply (walking around the seat), Joshu shows that the monk has walked around not the Subject, but merely its local reference system (the individual—essentially, an object), from which thousands of Buddhas came out. In effect, this "gate" is the monk himself, and his last question ("What is a gate of one hundred thousand Buddhas?") is a repetition of the same question, just in another form. Joshu "punishes" him for this (he points out to the monk his "running in circles").

(122)

"How do I avoid the five obstacles that limit me?" an old woman asked Joshu.

"Everyone prays to be reborn in heaven, but you must pray in an ocean of suffering!"

(Blais, 2001, p. 225)

You must not run away from life and development, which are realized in samsara through the local and limited, but try to overcome this limitedness with creativity. As long as you are alive, there is a chance for awakening.

(123)

Joshu asked a newcomer monk:

"Have you just arrived?"

"Yes," replied the monk.

"Have a cup of tea."

Then Joshu addressed another a monk”

“Have you just come as well?”

“No,” replied the monk.

“Then have a cup of tea.”

“Why do you offer tea to a new arrival in just the same way as you offer tea to one who has been living here for a long time?” the head monk, Inju, asked Joshu.

“Inju!”

“Yes?” responded the head monk.

“Have a cup of tea!”

(Blais, 2001, p. 226)

Joshu’s first question was a test; he was checking whether the monk perceived himself and the world as real. The reply “yes” shows that he sees him in time as local, limited quantitative processes of change in form. But with his offer of tea Joshu reduces the “no” reply from the second monk “to a common denominator,” since that monk as well, in his perception of the world, is tied to time, form, signs, and names. When asked by the third monk why the first two replies, even though they were different, are identical in form, the Master calls him by his name. Since the monk responds to his name, Joshu also reduces this reply “to the common denominator.” The koan has been framed, since the disciples must now recognize why all three questions are identical.

(124)

“Please explain what happens when a gem breaks on the neck of the Black Dragon,” a monk asked Daizui.

“Don’t try to understand the Living Treasure. You would do better to say how one breaks a gem.”

The monk was silent.

(Blais, 2001, p. 235)

Questions about what the Absolute is are nonsensical from the standpoint of the limited. Only an empty form that has no limitations can express and accommodate nonfinite content. The disciple is the instrument of this understanding, but in order to attain it, one must discard everything that is limited, concrete, and individual. Zen does not consist of the question “what is beyond the fence?” Followers must get past the foolishness of such questions. Buddhism is not a theory but an outright practice of attaining the limitless through the attainment by the follower himself of a “vacuum” form and a “fusion” with the Subject (total creativity).

(125)

“What is a clean *sangharama*?”<sup>54</sup> a monk asked Tyokoman.

“Dung flies are rummaging in a straw hut.”

(Blais, 2001, p. 299)

A *sangharama* is a place where monks plead for, beg for, try to earn for themselves, through persistent faith and worship of sacred objects, a thing like a blessing (Nirvana).

We have examined only a small portion of koans. We could continue their analysis, but there is no point in doing so, since all koans refer to the same thing. Despite all of their variety in form, they may be understood only from one position—by recognizing and overcoming one’s limitedness. A limited consciousness cannot recognize the framework of its limitation; this requires an instrument that does not overlap with consciousness—the intellect. Despite the fact that it is limited itself, it makes it possible to “grope” for the boundaries of consciousness and to “find” their source: needs, the ego, concepts (things), and so forth. It is the recognition of the reasons for one’s limitedness that means “embarking on the path of awakening” in Zen. Only when one “recognizes that one is dreaming” does the possibility of the awakening itself emerge. The follower’s subsequent work is not theory or religion, but the technique of awakening (meditation, insight, marginal states, etc.), which brings them closer to the most flexible possible (empty) form, which is the only one in which total creativity—*satori*—can occur.

It should be noted that all koans are “multidimensional,” but all interpretations lead to the same “source.” Each koan is as concrete as possible and enabled the disciple for whom it was framed to recognize his limitations in the form most intelligible to him. Clearly, the beauty and elegance of koans lie in their exceptional precision, conciseness, and simplicity. If their explanation turns out to be “abstruse” and not logical, that does not mean you are following the wrong road of intellectual thinking.

We do not think it makes any further sense to “ruin” koans with explanations, since after that they lose some of their capacity to “generate” insight in the reader when working with them.

If you do not have any nagging thoughts, if you do not have absurd ambitions,” said Fuketsu, “you do not need me. (Blais, 2001, p. 299)

## Notes

1. Even the term “culture” (*wen*) literally meant “written texts.”
2. “He who knows does not speak, he who speaks does not know” (Tao Te Ching).
3. For example, the martial arts.
4. It is important to note that many semantic aspects of koans have their own connotations in Christian literature as well. This is especially noticeable when comparing them with the apocrypha of the ancient Christians.
5. The apocryphal Gospel of Thomas says: “These are the secret sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas recorded. And he said, ‘Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death.’” Death here is the ultimate limitation of any individuality. The metaphorical references by Jesus to biological and social instincts that limit freedom and the attainment of the “Heavenly Kingdom” are usually interpreted as the necessity of the appropriate asceticism as a payment for Paradise.

6. A person can indeed attain such states, for example, in a hypnotic trance. During hypnotic anesthesia an individual actually feels bodily pain during surgery, but reacts to it in a detached manner, without linking himself to it.

7. As A.S. Pushkin wrote: "Inspiration is not for sale, but a manuscript can be sold."

8. Seigen, died 740.

9. Creativity disrupts the cause-and-effect relationship (see the section "The Psychology of Creativity").

10. The intellect and desire are the primary limitations of consciousness.

11. The attainment of emancipation or a state of sanctity.

12. "His disciples said to him, 'Twenty-four prophets have spoken in Israel, and they all spoke of you.' He said to them, 'You have disregarded the living one who is in your presence, and have spoken of the dead'" (GT, 57).

13. "Jesus said, 'Whoever has come to know the world has discovered a carcass, and whoever has discovered a carcass, of that person the world is not worthy'" (GT, 61).

14. It should be noted that Lin-Chi's comparisons are unusually felicitous. Indeed, by meditating on shunyata (emptiness), monks effectively identify it with an object that has value for them. Indeed, walls and a roof are made in order to create emptiness, and it is precisely for the volume of this "emptiness" that we pay apartment rent (i.e. "limited emptiness" is a value and therefore a thing). The vacuum of physicists is not emptiness, either—it is an object with compensated properties that may, under certain conditions, "engender" any physical particles. Monks confused Buddha as Nothingness with emptiness as a value ("a hole in a privy" is indeed useful).

15. Attachment to Nirvana as an absolute value turns it into a thing, and the monk into a donkey.

16. Religious meditation on "sacred" objects (and that to which any descriptor, even one such as "sacred," is applicable becomes a thing) not only leads to awakening, but immerses disciples even deeper into the dream. As the French say, "The more it repeats, the more it stays the same" [Apparent mistranslation into Russian here; what is meant is: "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."—Trans.]

17. What can be killed or demolished is merely a thing, a delusion of the intellect that must be destroyed. The disciple must annihilate in himself such a concept of the world.

18. Seppo (822–908).

19. "After all, what goes into your mouth will not defile you; rather, it's what comes out of your mouth that will defile you" (GT, 15).

20. Tenno (died 807), a disciple of Sekito.

21. The monk who manages clothing and food.

22. In other words, Chih-hsien rejected both the first and the second definition as applied to him, thereby demonstrating that death has nothing to do with it.

23. The best understanding of creativity, as an escape from a finite state, from all rules. His departure also does not fit the conventional definition of death.

24. "Jesus said, 'Those who seek should not stop seeking until they find. When they find, they will be disturbed. When they are disturbed, they will marvel, and will reign over all'" (GT).

25. In the Gospel of Thomas Jesus says: "When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty."

26. The Tathagata—"The one who has thus come"—the one who is not causally derived, Buddha.

27. Born 885.

28. A disciple of Ryutan, died 865.

29. "Jesus said, 'The Pharisees and the scholars have taken the keys of knowledge and

have hidden them. They have not entered nor have they allowed those who want to enter to do so” (GT, 44).

30. Died 834.

31. Shunyata—emptiness, Nothingness.

32. One of Buddha’s names (a ruler of the Shakya tribe).

33. Buddha understood as a religious symbol (see koan 6).

34. The concept of “external” is relative and means that it is impossible to overcome limit-  
edness “from within.” At the moment of a creative act “external” and “internal” disappear.

35. *Mu*—negation (Chinese).

36. And logic is always coercion (unfreedom), since it is always unequivocal and leaves  
no choice.

37. For variety, here is a commentary by R.H. Blyth, from whose book we are quoting many  
koans: “Kempo was a disciple of Tozan and a close friend of Ummon. In this story we see a  
conversation among two Christs, two Buddhas and two Socrateses. No one wins, no one loses.  
Asking for an answer without posing a question is the way the universe deals with us. Who is  
the Old Monk? It may be Buddha, who is no longer among the living. We are always late in  
every respect. It is human to be late. We act slowly but surely, surely but slowly. ‘Is that so?’  
is the most correct reaction to any remarks. It expresses polite surprise. In order to live, one  
must know how to be a thief. To get something for nothing is the goal of life, and Ummon tells  
Kempo: ‘You are just as much a thief as I am. Let’s be friends!’ That is the idea of friendship,  
as Thoreau understands it.” It is impossible even to comment on this verbal cocktail.

38. Strictly speaking, one can “return” to the old place only mentally, which is what a  
monk does in his limited world. In Reality nothing repeats.”

39. One wonders, can death in a dream be considered real if you really died from the  
fact that in the dream you had a dream that you really died? Is it really so good to die in  
a dream, and “where is the beginning of the end that comes at the end of the beginning?”  
(Koz’ma Prutkov).

40. “Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Compare me to something and tell me what I am like.’  
Simon Peter said to him, ‘You are like a just messenger.’ Matthew said to him, ‘You are like a  
wise philosopher.’ Thomas said to him, ‘Teacher, my mouth is utterly unable to say what you are  
like.’ Jesus said, ‘I am not your teacher. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated  
from the bubbling spring that I have tended.’ And he took him, and withdrew, and spoke three  
sayings to him. When Thomas came back to his friends they asked him, ‘What did Jesus say  
to you?’ Thomas said to them, ‘If I tell you one of the sayings he spoke to me, you will pick  
up rocks and stone me, and fire will come from the rocks and devour you” (GT, 14).

41. “Separate by the smallest amount, and you are as far from it as Heaven is from Earth”  
(Shinjinmei). The application to the Absolute of even one descriptor turns it into a thing.

42. “Jesus said to them, ‘If you fast, you will bring sin upon yourselves, and if you pray,  
you will be condemned, and if you give to charity, you will harm your spirits. When you  
go into any region and walk about in the countryside, when people take you in, eat what  
they serve you.” (GT, 15).

43. Since new content “comes” into Being from Nonbeing, “fusion with Nonbeing” is  
the death of the ego.

44. “Jesus said, ‘Whoever has something in hand will be given more, and whoever has  
nothing will be deprived of even the little they have” (GT, 46).

45. The Gospels cite astonishing words from Christ: “The Son can do nothing by himself;  
he can do only what he sees his Father doing” (John 2:19 [correctly 5:19.—Trans.].

46. The analog of “original sin” in Christianity.

47. An advanced commentator on sutras (a teacher of Buddhism) who has not yet at-  
tained awakening himself.

48. “I thought a Persian had a red beard, and now I know a Persian who has a red beard.”

49. In essence, the same answer by choosing the opposite of the monk's choice (to receive a blow or to inflict one).

50. Buddhist monks also learned martial arts (for example, in Shaolin) and could kill without being held accountable for it if it was a spontaneous act (not from the ego). To accuse them was the same as making claims against an earthquake or other natural disasters.

51. Daiten, a disciple of Sekito (700-790) who studied under Seigen.

52. "Let there be among you a person who understands. When the crop ripened, he came quickly carrying a sickle and harvested it. Anyone here with two good ears had better listen!" (GT, 26)

53. "Jesus said, 'If your leaders say to you, "Look, the (Father's) kingdom is in the sky," then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, "It is in the sea," then the fish will precede you. Rather, the (Father's) kingdom is within you and it is outside you'" (GT, 2).

54. Sangharama (garam)—the main building of a temple.

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