RECORD OF EASE, Case 94:
Dongshan Is Not Well

by Michael Kieran

The Case:
Dongshan was not well. A monk asked, "Your Reverence is not well. Is there someone, after all, who is not sick?"
Dongshan said, "There is."
The monk said, "Does the person who is not sick look after your Reverence?"
Dongshan said, "This old monk is looking after that one."
The monk said, "How is it when you are looking after that one?"
Dongshan said, "Then the old monk does not see any sickness."

In their profound compassion our Zen Ancestors used to say: Knowing how to stop is the ultimate virtue. Of course, "knowing how" means actually stopping, not just having an idea or belief that it is possible. All of us are fully endowed with this virtue, although if we never exercise it, this ultimate virtue is of no value at all. Appropriately, there is no "stop" button we can push to stop—that would just be another thing to do. We don't need a stop button, we just need to stop pushing the "on" button and recreating ourselves over and over. As sure as we can raise our hand, we can also not raise our hand. It is part of who we are, part of the package of being a human being. In our practice we stop by completing one count of the breath, or one Mu, one sip of tea, that's all. There is no next thing and no sequence. "Knowing how to stop" is the ultimate virtue.

Today we return to the *Record of Ease*. For those of you who may not be familiar with the various koan collections we take up in our koan study in the Diamond Sangha, the *Record of Ease* is a collection of one hundred public cases or koans compiled by the 12th Century master Hongzhi Zhengjue. Hongzhi is also referred to as Tiantong Hongzhi, having taught at Tiantong Monastery, where three generations after Hongzhi a young monk from Japan named Dōgen Kigen studied and realized the Way under his teacher Tiantong Rujing. Hongzhi selected the one hundred cases from the records of Zen ancestors who lived and taught 200-400 years before him. Hongzhi also wrote vivid appreciatory verses illuminating each of the 100 cases. Around 50 years after Hongzhi died, the master Wansong Xingxiu

took up Hongzhi's collection of 100 cases and verses and wrote Teishō for each case and verse. He also added introductory remarks or pointers to each case and inserted his own comments into the exchanges presented in the cases. These sorts of intra-linear koan comments are called "capping phrases." Along with presenting the main cases of the *Record of Ease*, in these Teishō I will often share with you Hongzhi's verses and some of Wansong's poignant commentary and "capping phrases." I tell you this so when I mention Hongzhi and Wansong in the Teishō you will hopefully remember that they are co-authors of the *Record of Ease*.

In our case today we have the master Dongshan Shouchu, a tenth century master and successor of the great Yunmen Wenyan. He should not be confused with Dongshan Liangjie, co-founder of the Caodong or Sōtō lineage who lived about a hundred years earlier. We've previously met Dongshan Shouchu in Case 15 of the *Gateless Barrier* where, as a young monk he had traveled over a thousand miles on foot to meet the great master Yunmen.

> Yunmen asked him, "Where have you been lately?" Dongshan said, "At Chadu." Yunmen said, "Where were you during the summer?" Dongshan said, "At Baoci Monastery in Hunan." Yunmen said, "When did you leave there?" Dongshan said, "August 25th." Yunmen said, "I spare you sixty blows."
> The next day, Dongshan went again and asked, "Yesterday you spared me sixty blows. I don't know where I went wrong." Yunmen said, "You rice bag! Do you go about like that—now west of the river, now south of the lake?" With these words, Dongshan profoundly awakened.

He became a marvelous teacher who used to exhort his students to "study the living word; don't study the dead word." The living word is "Muuuu"—the very Mu you are breathing, or the count of the breath you are breathing: "three…". The living word is the embodied word! THIS word. The dead word is the abstract word, disembodied word, the rootless word. Study the living word; don't study the dead word.

Our case today takes place near the end of Dongshan's life when he was not feeling well.

Have you ever noticed how challenging it can be to not get caught up in self-centered thoughts and emotions when we're not feeling well: Woe is me. Why is this happening to me? And so on. Where is our practice at such a time? And if we only practice when we're feeling well—what sort of practice is that?

Dongshan was not well. A monk asked, "Your Reverence is not well. Is there someone, after all, who is not sick?"

This seems to be a rather bold monk—either that, or he was rather rude saying to Dongshan who was old and quite sick: "Your Reverence is not well. Is there someone, after all, who is not sick?" What would you say to such a person?

Dongshan seems to welcome the question and without batting an eye he responds:

"There is."

Right there! "Is there someone, after all, who is not sick?" "There is!" Did you see him? Study the living word; don't study the dead word.

Here's a related story:

> Once when Yunyan was sweeping the grounds, Daowu said, "Utterly worthless!" Yunyan said, "You should realize there is someone not worthless." Daowu said, "In that case there's a second moon." Yunyan brandished his brushwood broom saying, "Which moon is this? Daowu desisted.

Who is the one who is not sick? You mean there is a second moon? If not, then what? At such a time is there really one who is not sick? …
"There is !!!!"

The monk doesn't see that one though and asks Dongshan:

"Does the person who is not sick look after your Reverence?"

This is the conventional view, the self-referential view. It's all about me, right? We too may imagine—all this hard work of practice will pay off one of these days and I will reap the benefits and attain enlightenment. Then I will receive the mercy and benevolence of the Buddhas and suffer no more. Won't that be nice?

I'm dramatizing a bit and I'm not saying this won't happen. I'm not saying you won't awaken and reap the benefits of your dedicated practice. What I'm saying is, it's already like this. The thing to understand about the conventional self-referential, self-centered view and way of life that we get caught up in, is that *it is not a moral failing*. It is the field and context of awakening and profound compassion.

But the monk doesn't see the not sick one and quite innocently and curiously asks Dongshan, "Does the person who is not sick look after your Reverence?"

Dongshan replies, "This old monk is looking after that one."

HO! Surprise! Isn't it the not sick who usually take care of the sick? If you have Covid, how do you take care of the one who doesn't have Covid? How 'bout if you're depressed or anxious—how do you take care of the one who isn't depressed or anxious? Are these separate people?

Sickness doesn't need to impede health. Some are radiantly healthy on their death beds; some are deathly ill while seeming to be pain free and functioning well in the world. The crooked does not conceal the straight, nor does the straight eliminate or obscure the crooked.

In speaking of sick and not sick, Dongshan is simply using what the monk has brought him. No need to bring in more words and concepts. Zen does not rely on words or concepts. The not sick one that Dongshan looks after is neither sick nor not sick, neither self nor other. It is the "looking after" which allows no place for such dualistic ideas and frameworks to gain a foothold. The not sick one knows nothing about being sick or not sick. The Buddha doesn't know she is Buddha.

Dongshan says, "This old monk is looking after that one."

The monk said, "How is it when you are looking after that one?"

Again, a wonderful question from this monk! He may have seemed a little rude or brash at the beginning but we can learn much from him. He is not seeking to posses knowledge. He is interested in experience, in particular the experience of practice and realization. If he was only seeking knowledge he would have been satisfied with Dongshan saying, "This old monk is looking after that one," or maybe Dongshan saying "There is." Is there someone, after all, who is not sick?" "There is." Oh, okay—now I understand—there is someone who is not sick—and off he would go clutching a useless concept, believing it and maybe arguing with others about it.

But no. This monk is not that way. He asks, "How is it when you are looking after that one?" Like you and me, he is not satisfied with only conceptual knowledge and belief.

Dongshan said, "Then the old monk does not see any sickness." Dongshan doesn't see any sickness. What then does he see?

Wansong gives us a hint in his Teishō when he says: "When the ancients were about to go, they frolicked in the realm of old age, sickness, and death." In the spirit of the monk in our case today, we might want to ask: How is it when you are frolicking in the realm of sickness, old age, and death? Wansong doesn't elaborate further about this frolicking in his Teishō, but here is a passage from the Daoist classic, *The Zhuangzi*, that explores the delights that might await us:

> Ziji, Ziyu, Zili, and Zilai were talking. One of them said, "Who can see nothingness as his own head, life as his own spine, and death as his own ass? Who knows the single body formed by life and death, existence and nonexistence? I will be his friend!" The four looked at one another and laughed, feeling complete concord, and became friends.

> Suddenly, Ziyu took ill. Ziji went to see him. Ziyu said, "How great is the Source of Things, making me all tangled up like this!" For his chin was tucked into his navel, his shoulders towered over the crown of his head, his ponytail pointed toward the sky, his five internal organs at the top of him, his thigh bones taking the place of his ribs, and his yin and yang energies in chaos. But his mind was relaxed and unbothered. He hobbled over to the well to get a look at his reflection. "Wow!" he said. "The Source of Things has really gone and tangled me up!" Ziji said, "Do you dislike it?"
>
> Ziyu said, "Not at all. What is there to dislike? Perhaps my left arm will transform into a rooster; thereby I'll be announcing the dawn. Perhaps my butt will become wheels and my spirit a horse; thereby I'll be riding along—will I need any other vehicle? Anyway, getting it is a matter of the time coming, and losing it is just something else to follow along with. Content in the time and finding one's place in the process of following along, picking and choosing, joy and sorrow are unable to seep in."

Here is Master Hongzhi's appreciatory verse for today's case:

> Taking off the smelly skin bag,
> Casting away the mass of red flesh;
> Directly, the nose is straight,
> Immediately, the skull is dry.
> The old doctor doesn't see the indigestion from before—
> The little one looks in on him, but it's hard to approach.
> When the meadow streams are thin, the autumn ponds recede;
> Where the white clouds end, the old mountains are cold.
> You must cut off absolutely, don't be big-headed.
> Turning, completely without effort, she attains authenticity;
> Lofty and solitary, she does not share the same position as you.

"Taking off the smelly skin bag,
Casting away the mass of red flesh;"

This is what Dōgen Zenji called "shinjin datsuraku!"—body and mind fallen away, the fallen away body and mind. This does not mean that body and mind are disposed of leaving behind a disembodied essence or true self of some sort. No. It is the fallen away body-mind that is awakening. It is the true body-mind realizing itself apart from all ideas, concepts, and smelly, messy identities, even fresher than a new born baby.

"Directly (right here), the nose is straight,"

When Dōgen Zenji returned from Japan and was asked what he had realized through his practice there, he said: "Eyes horizontal, nose vertical." The fallen away body-mind, right here now just as it is. When this realization is clear you will never again be deceived by others.

"Immediately, the skull is dry."

The skull is dry means that we've ceased to be interested in our delusive thoughts and they have dried up. Our skull is dry bone!

Elsewhere in his writings, Master Hongzhi says:

> When the stains from old habits are exhausted, the original light appears, blazing through your skull, not admitting any other matters. Vast and spacious, like sky and water merging during autumn, like snow and moon having the same color, this field is without boundary, beyond direction, magnificently one entity without edge or seam. Further, when you turn about and drop off everything completely, realization occurs.

"The old doctor doesn't see the indigestion from before—"

The old doctor is old Dongshan, white haired, and maybe a bit lame and hard of hearing. Maybe there's some cancer or some infection happening in his body. This old monk is taking care of the one who is not sick and in so doing doesn't see anything that could be called sickness.

Wansong's capping phrase here says: It's just that he doesn't agree to investigate the temporary. The old doctor, the King of Doctors, our true and original nature without beginning or end, though in the midst of all that comes and goes doesn't see anything that comes and goes.

In most religions people are told to believe. That is not what I'm suggesting you do. I'm not saying you should know or believe that there is someone who doesn't come and go or who is not sick. What I am urging you to do is look and see for yourself. Look exhaustively and your skeptical doubt will turn to great doubt and your great doubt will break out in great realization. But if you even depend a little on knowledge and belief and don't thoroughly apply yourself and investigate exhaustively, you will not get to the bottom of it.

Hongzhi's verse continues:

"The little one looks in on him, but it's hard to approach."

The little one is the constructed one, the tentative one, trying to get by on conceptual knowledge, hope, and belief. Ignoring the family treasure that has been hers from the beginning. The treasure is hard to approach because it is so very near.

"When the meadow streams are thin, the autumn ponds recede; where the white clouds end, the old mountains are cold."

This is what it's like to look after the not sick one, to investigate exhaustively, with bones, organs, muscles and joints. The stream of thoughts dries up when we don't keep feeding it, the ponds of knowledge recede. Where the path of thought and words ends, you are deep in the mountains with the great way extending endlessly in every direction. Cold here is not dead but without emotional attachment.

The empty aspect of life is not something to fear. It is the freedom to actually live our lives as they are. Our fear comes from making emptiness into something, an idea, a concept of emptiness.

"You must cut off absolutely, Don't be big-headed (cheat)."

Particularly as you begin to enjoy some insight and clarity, you must not cling to it thinking you've attained something. This kindest of advice is for your own protection, wisdom, and power. If you hang on to any idea of attainment it will tether you like a beautiful wild animal tied to a stake and going around and around trying to get free.

"Turning completely without effort, she attains authenticity;"

Let go of all ideas of attainment and any coercion or self-centered effort. The is what the ancients called wuwei—non-doing. What is called "attainment" simply becomes returning to our original nature.

"Lofty and solitary, she does not share the same position as you."

The lone standout—above the heavens, below the heavens, solitary and exquisite!

This solitariness or aloneness is not isolation or detachment but simply no longer dividing the world into self and other. The true person of no position, as Linji called it. Dōgen called it body and mind fallen away—the fallen away body and mind.

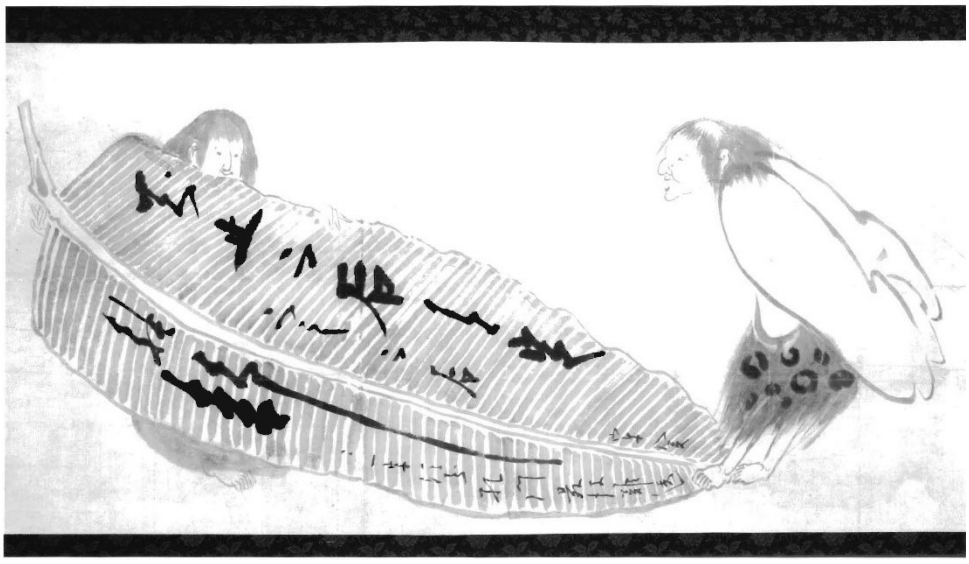
She does not share the same position as you—this is like the other Dongshan, Dongshan Liangjie, who exclaimed upon awakening:

> Today, I am walking alone,
> Yet everywhere I meet him.
> He is now no other than myself,
> But I am not now him.
> It must be understood in this way
> In order to merge with Suchness.

Honolulu Diamond Sangha
Pālolo Zen Center
2747 Wai'ōma'o Rd.
Honolulu, HI 96816
Phone: 808-735-1347
Email: info@diamondsangha.org
Website: www.diamondsangha.org

Hakuin's Calligraphy

Among Hakuin's many stunning calligraphies is the Chinese character 定 *ding*, which in ordinary usage means: stable, to set in place, make secure, to settle a situation, to stop disturbance or uncertainty, etc. In the Buddhist context it means *samādhi*. The writing to the left of 定 reads: "The ability to stop is the ultimate virtue. Knowing how to stop [results in] samādhi."



Hakuin: *Hanshan and Shide with banana leaf.*
The writing on the leaf reads:

> When you understand how to stop, you are stable.
> When you are stable, then your mind can be still.
> Stillness is the one matter needed to pass through the barrier.
> The ultimate difficulty is to penetrate this one teaching.

Ref: *The Sound of One Hand — Paintings and Calligraphy by Zen master Hakuin*, Audrey Yoshiko Seo and Stephen Addiss, Shambhala Publications, 2010, p181-184.

Great Fool
Daigu (aka Ryōkan 1758?-1831)
by Clark Ratliffe

"If you speak delusions, everything becomes a delusion;
If you speak the truth, everything becomes the truth.
Outside the truth there is no delusion,
But outside delusion there is no special truth.
Followers of Buddha's Way!
Why do you so earnestly seek the truth in distant places?
Look for delusion and truth in the bottom of your own hearts"—Daigu, aka Ryōkan (Stevens).

D.T. Suzuki wrote in *Zen and Japanese Culture* "When we know one Ryōkan, we know hundreds of thousands of Ryōkans in Japanese hearts. All who wish truly to understand Japan should study the life and poetry of this eighteenth century hermit monk."

Ryōkan exemplifies the compelling notion of an ordinary person walking in the footsteps of the Buddha and then, after great realization, returning to the world living a simple life. His love for the many beings was so great and broad (like his name) that before washing his robe he carefully removed all the lice and then later just as carefully replaced them so they would be safe. Ryō means: good, virtuous, respectable, and kan means: broad, wide, spacious; let go, release, free from worry; large minded, magnanimous, generous, liberal, tolerant, generosity and large heartedness. In his life he was indeed also Daigu, the "Great Fool" (the literary name he gave himself), one who had gone beyond the limitations of all artificial man-made restraints.

The Zen master and poet Ryōkan was born around 1758 in the village of Izumozaki, which is in a rather remote area on the northwest coast of Japan. It is rural snow country and known to be bitterly cold in the winter. His childhood name was Eizo.

Eizo grew up in a prosperous family as his father was the village headman. He attended a private Confucian school where he received a general education in Chinese and Japanese literature including the various classical forms of poetry. As the eldest son he would have been expected to succeed his father as village headman. However, in 1775 at the age of 17 he abruptly abandoned his administrative training position and entered a local temple of the Soto Zen sect. His younger brother, Yoshiyuki, replaced him as the family heir. This would have been a very unusual step for the eldest son of the headman to take. Burton Watson, the translator of *Ryōkan: Zen Monk – Poet of Japan,* recounts numerous anecdotes about this time in young Eizo's life as possible reasons for his decision. He is described as a sensitive and bookish boy who was not suited to the administrative life. There were tales of him bungling mediations and being too forthright and frank—thus sometimes insulting people by his lack of tact. He was apparently unable to be diplomatic. There is also a tale of him being traumatized by witnessing the beheading of a person his father found guilty of a crime (Watson).

In 1777 at around 19 years of age, he shaved his head, took the name Ryōkan, and started his training at the local Zen temple. About four years later a famous Zen master, Kokusen, came to lecture. Ryōkan was so moved by him that he decided to follow Kokusen to his temple, Entsu-ji in Okayama Prefecture, and become his disciple. Ryōkan was twenty-two years old. He stayed with Kokusen for nearly twelve years and, in addition to his formal Zen training, continued his study of waka (a form of Chinese poetry), renga (linked verse), haiku and calligraphy. In 1790, just one year before Kokusen died, he gave Ryōkan inka, certifying him as a fully transmitted teacher. After his teacher's death, rather than taking over as the abbot of Entsu-

ji, Ryōkan left and wandered about for the next five or so years. Almost no details are known about this time in his life.

With the family fortunes in decline, Ryōkan's father went to the capital in Kyoto and, for reasons that are unknown, instead of returning home he drowned himself. Ryōkan heard this and went to attend his father's memorial service in Kyoto. He stayed at various temples in the area and eventually, around 1804, was allowed to settle in a small abandoned one room hermitage on the slopes of Mount Kugami. The hermitage was named Gogō-an or Five Rice-Scoop Hermitage. This name was conferred by a previous monk who was paid five small scoops of rice a day to greet pilgrims and guide them to the temple at the top of the mountain. Ryōkan received nothing but permission to live there. He supported himself by takahatsu (begging) in the villages below. Ryōkan lived a solitary life from the age of forty to his death thirty-four years later in 1831 at the age of seventy-three. He became a masterful poet whose work has been translated into many languages and a master calligrapher whose work is now considered priceless.

Here is one of my favorite Ryōkan poems:

> If someone asks my abode
> I reply: "The east edge of the Milky Way."
> Like a drifting cloud,
> Bound by nothing
> I just let go
> Giving myself up
> To the whim of the wind (Stevens)

What an expansive view! What freedom! He is like a drifting cloud with no preconceived notion of where he's supposed to be or where he's going. Novice monks in a Japanese monastery are called unsui, which means "cloud-water." A cloud is insubstantial, ephemeral and water flows freely and assumes the shape of its surroundings. Because Ryōkan has no preconceived notion, his mind does not limit him, and he can be or go anywhere, with equanimity. This is complete liberation, freedom from all restraint. As Hakuin says in his *Song of Zazen*, "…with form that is no form, going and coming—never astray." Wherever life takes him, he will go. How wonderful! Ryōkan's poem reminds me of the following koan from *The Record of Transmitting the Light:*

Thirty-First Ancestor Dayi Daoxin

> Dayi Daoxin made his bows before Jianzhi and said, "I beg the compassion of Your Reverence. Please teach me the Dharma way of emancipation."
>
> Jianzhi said, "Who is binding you?"
>
> Dayi Daoxin said, "No one is binding me."
>
> Jianzhi said, "Then why should you search for emancipation?"
>
> Hearing this Dayi Daoxin had great realization.

Verse

> The mind of vacant, pure wisdom has no right or wrong,
> no one can tell what is bound or released;
> though it is divided into five skandas and four elements;
> seeing colors and hearing voices are no other than that.

Ryōkan says he is like a drifting cloud bound by nothing. What is he saying here? Is he saying he is just footloose and fancy free? I suppose he is, but he is alluding to something more. Can you say that you are "bound by nothing?" If not, then who is binding you? And if you say "no one"—what is that? Even if you say "Me. I'm binding me"—again, what is that?

When the verse to this koan refers to the "mind of vacant, pure wisdom" it is not talking about an empty mind; but rather the mind of emptiness out of which pure wisdom naturally arises. It is a common misconception about our practice that during our meditation we empty the mind. As you well know, emptying the mind is very nearly impossible and not an activity worth pursuing. Our old ancestors cautioned against this practice and called it dead void sitting. As we focus on counting the breath or a koan and thoughts arise, we simply return to our practice and make no attempt to either embrace or

run from those distractions. The only thing giving life and sustainability to a thought is our attention, and we choose what we attend to. Dogen wrote, "What you attend to you bring to life; so choose wisely (Masunaga).

Okay, so what about this mind of vacant, pure wisdom? What is the content of that? It has no right or wrong and is neither bound nor released. The poem says it is divided into the five skandas. During our sutra services we list the five skandas in the Heart Sutra: form, sensation, perception, formulation and consciousness. And what did we say about them? They are empty. If this makes no sense, don't worry about it. In fact, don't even think about it because this isn't something to figure out, but something to experience. A word like "emptiness" is just a flimsy placeholder for an experience that has no words or explanation.

Here's another famous poem by Ryōkan along the same lines:

> The rain has stopped, the clouds have drifted away,
> and the weather is clear again.
> If your heart is pure, then all things in your world are pure.
> Abandon this fleeting world, abandon yourself,
> Then the moon and flowers will guide you along the Way (Stevens).

This poem reminds me of an anecdote I read about Ryōkan. A scholar once went to visit him at Gogō-an in the early morning. When the visitor arrived he found Ryōkan sitting in zazen. Not wanting to disturb him the scholar waited till he was done, some three hours later. Ryōkan was very happy to see this fellow and they talked about poetry, literature and art all day. As it became dark Ryōkan wanted to get some sake to accompany further conversation and told the scholar to wait a few minutes while he ran to the village to get sake. The scholar waited and waited and waited. No Ryōkan. Finally, he got tired of waiting and left the hut only to find Ryōkan sitting under a nearby pine gazing at the full moon. "Ryōkan where have you been? I've been waiting for you for three hours! I was worried." Ryōkan then said, "Oh you have come just in time. Isn't the moon fantastic?!" The scholar said, "Yes, yes; but where is the sake?" "Sake? Oh yes I forgot!" With that Ryōkan leapt up and ran off to get sake.

Let's look at the first part of this poem:

> "The rain has stopped, the clouds have drifted away, and the weather is clear again."

This isn't a poem about the weather. All things are what they are through and through. I read a commentary on this line somewhere that said something like "our mind is fundamentally clear, like the sky, and when thoughts leave, like clouds and rain moving away, the mind is clear again." This completely misses the mark. The mind is fundamentally clear alright; but the clarity includes the rain, the clouds, as well as the pure empty sky. These are all of one piece and we don't know anything about right or wrong…clear or cloudy. Thoughts are not the enemy.

The next part of the poem is:

> "If your heart is pure, then all things in your world are pure."

I believe the kanji for heart and mind are the same (Shin/Xin). Stevens translates this as heart, but let's call this "heartmind", which works better because heart and mind are not two different things. The real question, however, is how can purifying the heart or mind purify the whole world? What about the atrocities in Ukraine? What about shooting 19 elementary school children. What about George Floyd? I could go on and on… The Edo period of Ryōkan's time was pretty rough as well. Ryōkan's speaks to this:

> I don't tell the murky world to turn pure.
> I purify myself
> and check my reflection
> in the water of the valley brook.

Or how about this koan from the *Blue Cliff Record, Case 6: Yunmen's Good Day:*

> Yunmen taught by saying, "I do not ask you about before the 15th of the month. Come, give a phrase about after the 15th.
> He himself responded, "Every day is a good day."

When you work on this koan Michael or Kathy might ask you about those 19 dead children. Was that a good day? How will you respond? Is it really enough to just purify yourself? So the crux here is what is this pure mind that Ryōkan is talking about? Please don't say it is all empty. It is open and free and vast. Free of greed, ill-will, and delusion (the three poisons in Buddhism) and even free of the idea of these things. He gives a hint in the next lines:

> Abandon this fleeting world, abandon yourself,
> Then the moon and flowers will guide you along the Way.

Stop clinging to impermanent things, and that includes…well, everything! This hanging on is the source of all suffering. And the most tenacious thing we cling to is the notion that we ourselves are some kind of fixed permanent entity. The sense of self is so shaky because the self is not really there. So what is there? The moon and flowers… and tears for dead children.

Once Ryōkan's brother asked him to come visit and speak to his delinquent nephew. Ryōkan came but didn't say anything to the wayward nephew. He stayed the night and the next morning as he was preparing to leave he asked his nephew to please tie his straw zoris for him. As the nephew was doing this he felt warm drops on the back of his head. Looking up he saw his uncle looking down at him with tears streaming down. Ryōkan then left. He had said enough.

Here is another poem which speaks to his life of renunciation:

> Truly, I love this life of seclusion.
> Carrying my staff, I walk toward a friend's cottage.
> The trees in his garden, soaked by the evening rain,
> Reflect the cool, clear autumnal sky.
> The owner's dog comes to greet me;
> Chrysanthemums bloom along the fence.
> These people have the same spirit as the ancients;
> An earthen wall marks their separation from the world.
> In the house volumes of poetry are piled on the floor.
> Abandoning worldliness, I often come to this tranquil place—
> The spirit here is the spirit of Zen (Stevens).

The notion of abandoning the world is something we hear frequently in Zen poetry, sutras and stories. Obviously, in the literal sense, this is usually referring to being a home leaver, a monastic living in a temple or monastery. But how can the world be abandoned? Where would you go? As someone who spent fourteen years living in two monasteries and three Zen centers, I can promise you that it was not possible to leave the world behind. But Ryōkan does not say he abandoned the world, only worldliness. Very different. To me this is key to living the Precepts and walking the Buddha Way. Abandoning worldliness also does not mean to become a hermit. Ryōkan is often referred to as a hermit monk, but while he lived alone in a solitary hut, he reveled in the company of others…especially children

> In this village
> coming and going
> there are so many people –
> but when you're not among them
> it's lonely

"Grass Fight"

> Again with the boys I fought a hundred grasses,
> fought going, fought coming—what a brave fight we had!
> Sun setting, lonely now, everyone gone home—
> one round bright moon, whiter than autumn.

"Playing with the Children"

> Early spring
> The landscape is tinged with the first
> fresh hints of green
> Now I take my wooden begging bowl
> And wander carefree through town
> The moment the children see me
> They scamper off gleefully to bring their friends

They're waiting for me at the temple gate
Tugging from all sides so I can barely walk
I leave my bowl on a white rock
Hang my pilgrim's bag on a pine tree branch
First we duel with blades of grass
Then we play ball
While I bounce the ball, they sing the song
Then I sing the song and they bounce the ball
Caught up in the excitement of the game
We forget completely about the time
Passersby turn and question me:
"Why are you carrying on like this?"
I just shake my head without answering
Even if I were able to say something
how could I explain?
Do you really want to know the meaning of
it all?
This is it! This is it! (Abé & Haskel).

The most important things in life, for many people, are things like status, wealth, power, comfort and pleasure. A person's worth in the eyes of the world are measured with these kinds of things. In our society monastics are not valued in the same way as in Japan, China, Vietnam, Tibet etc. Anyone who does not strive for what most people consider important in life is regarded as an "underachiever."

In my view "abandoning worldliness" is more a reframing of what is most important in life rather than specific acts of renunciation, like becoming a monastic. Shakyamuni gave up the power and prosperity of being a prince and being the ruler of a kingdom, not to become a monk; but because those things did not lead to peace and contentment…so he stepped away. The point is that abandoning worldliness is not a turning away but a turning towards. Ryōkan did not so much turn away from the life of a village headman as turn toward a life of zazen, poetry, and calligraphy to which he was more suited. He couldn't help himself. Although he was a monk, Ryōkan also left the monastery life behind. The great Tibetan Master, Tsongkhapa Lobzang Drakpa (1357–1419), put it this way: "When there is not the slightest ambition, even for a split second, for even the greatest successes in the world, the mind of renunciation has arisen" (Jinpa).

We seek success in the way we live and in what kind of person we are. So if even the greatest successes are fundamentally without substantiality, what is substantial in your life? There is no amount of money, power or prestige that will give you an answer to that question. It's not that we shouldn't become a headman or a CEO, but when we do, we live that life, as Linji says, a person of no rank. We allow time in our lives to express and nourish that part of ourselves which is profoundly authentic and deeply compassionate and free—and that is zazen.

Book of Ease, *Case 38: Linji's True Person:*

> Linji addressed his assembly and said, "There is one true person of no rank that is always coming and going from the faces of each of you. If you beginners have not yet verified it, look!, look!"
>
> A monk stepped forward and said, "What is the true person of no rank?"
>
> Linji descended from the rostrum and seized the monk. The monk hesitated. Linji pushed him away and said, "The true person of no rank—what a piece of dried shit!"

Ryōkan's life was not all tranquility and peaceful serenity. It sounds so idyllic to live quietly in a mountain hut; but… Here is another side to that romanticized vision. This one is especially for those of us in a certain demographic:

Light sleep, the bane of old age:
Dozing off, evening dreams, waking again.
The fire in the hearth flickers; all night a steady rain
Pours off the banana tree.
Now is the time I wish to share my feelings –
But there is no one.

or

The long winter night!
The long winter night seems endless;
When will it be day?
No flame in the lamp nor charcoal in the fireplace;
Lying in bed, listening to the sound of freezing rain.

To an old man, dreams come easy;
I let my thoughts drift.
The room is empty and both the saké and the oil are used up—
The long winter night

Ryōkan's loneliness is palpable. Just getting through the night seems a monumental task, especially as he gets older. One evening Ryōkan returned to Gōgo-an, his simple little hut, to find that his home had been broken into and his possessions stolen. His calligraphy brush, begging bowl, and the one blanket he used to sleep with were all stolen. Ryōkan sat down and gazed out the window. Reflecting on what he had lost and what could not be taken away from him, he composed this haiku*:*

The thief left it behind:
the moon
at my window.

Eventually, his health began to worsen, and his friends felt that he had to leave his mountain hermitage. He moved to a small hut near a shrine down the mountain, and in 1826 when he was sixty-nine with his health declining even further, he went to live with one of his disciples in the city of Shimazaki, but, not surprisingly, he insisted on staying in the firewood shed behind the garden.

About a year later Teishin, a young 29-year-old nun who was an accomplished poet in her own right, came to visit Ryōkan, but he was away and so she left him a poem:

You who play in the Buddha Way
bouncing a ball endlessly must be the one.
Is it your dharma?

Ryōkan sent this in return:

Try bouncing a ball.
One, two, three, four, five,
six, seven, eight, nine, ten.
You end at ten
and start again.

This was the beginning of a deep companionship that lasted the remainder of Ryōkan's life. They loved each other's company and spent hours composing poems and talking about literature and religion. At the time of their meeting he would have been 69 and was becoming quite frail. I can only imagine how wonderful it must have been for him to have the closeness of this kindred spirit during the last four years of his life. Teishin held Ryōkan's head in her lap as he died. Here is one of Ryōkan's last verses:

Life is like a dewdrop,
Empty and fleeting;
My years are gone
And now, quivering and frail,
I must fade away

Four years after his death Teishin published a collection of Ryōkan's poems entitled *Dewdrops on a Lotus Leaf*. She devoted herself to Ryōkan's memory until her death in 1872.

Yes, I'm truly a fool
Living among trees and plants.
Please don't question me about illusion and enlightenment —
This old fellow just likes to smile to himself.
I wade across streams with bony legs,
And carry a bag about in fine spring weather.
That's my life,
And the world owes me nothing.

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Jizo Gets a New Hat

Jizo (地蔵/womb of the earth), as they are called, are made in the image of Jizo Bosatsu, also called O-Jizo-san or O-Jizo-sama. They are guardian Bodhisattvas of children and travelers. They're also known as the "earth bearer", so Jizo statues are usually made out of stone, which is said to have power for protection and longevity. Our Jizo Bosatsu, is a kind and patient presence, and is fine with eroding under rainwater and being covered in moss. While there are many other Japanese folklores associated with Jizo, for us this small stone presence, standing under our Bodhi Tree, greets us as we enter the zendo in our journey along the Buddha Way, offering protection and power when we need it.

Many Jizo statues wear red bibs and hoods. Since ancient times in Japan, red has been believed to ward off evil. Thus, some people put red bibs and hoods on Jizo for protection. Karen kindly made this one after the previous hat disintegrated from the elements over the years.

Fall picnic at Ho'omaluhia Botanical Gardens on a beautiful day.

Highlights from the Calendar

PZC is open for zazen and dokusan on Sunday mornings from 9 to 11 am and Wednesday evenings from 7 to 9 pm, adhering to our covid-safety forms. Deviations from this schedule and important dates are listed below. Please check our website regularly for the complete calendar and for updates: www.diamondsangha.org

March 2023

3/10: Fri. 5 pm. Gather for Spring sesshin.

3/11 to 3/15: Spring sesshin. Temple closed.

3/25: Sat. 9 am to noon. Orientation to practice. Advanced signup required. Please contact administrator at info@diamondsangha.org.

3/26: Sun. 9 am to noon. Samu followed by lunch.

3/29: Wed. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen, dokusan and Q & R with Michael.

April 2023

4/1: SIGNUP DEADLINE FOR HELE MĀLIE.
4/2: Sun. 9:30 am. Zoom zazen**. 10 am to noon.** Annual meeting on Zoom.

4/9: Sun. 9 to 11 am. Hanamatsuri, followed by cake and tea.

4/14: Fri. 5 pm. Gather for Maui sesshin with Michael. **4/15 to 4/19:** Maui sesshin.

4/15: Sat. 9 am to noon. Orientation to practice. Advanced signup required. Please contact administrator at info@diamondsangha.org.

4/23: Sun. 9 am to 4 pm. Hiking zazenkai. Trailhead to be announced.

4/26: Wed. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen, dokusan and Q & R with Michael.

4/30: Sun. 9 am to noon. Samu followed by lunch.

May 2023

5/14: Sun. Hele Mālie travel day.

5/15 to 5/19: Hele Mālie.

5/19: Fri. SIGNUP DEADLINE FOR SUMMER SESSHIN.

5/24: Wed. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen, dokusan and Q & R with Michael.

5/27: Sat. 9 am to noon. Orientation to practice. Advanced signup required. Please contact administrator at info@diamondsangha.org.

5/28: Sun. 9 am to noon. Samu followed by lunch.

5/31: Wed. 7 to 9 pm. Opening of IPP.

June 2023—IPP

6/1: Thur. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen and Sangha practice talk.

6/5: Mon. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen and dokusan.

6/6: Tue. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen.

6/8: Thur. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen and Sangha practice talk.

6/12: Mon. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen and dokusan.

6/13: Tue. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen.

6/15: Thur. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen and Sangha practice talk.

6/18: Sun. 8:30 am to 4 pm. Zazenkai. Bring a lunch.

6/19: Mon. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen and dokusan.

6/20: Tue. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen.

6/22: Thur. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen and Sangha practice talk.

6/25: Sun. 9 am to noon. Samu followed by lunch.

6/26: Mon. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen and dokusan.

6/27: Tue. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen.

6/28: Wed. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen, dokusan and Q & R with Michael.

6/29: Thur. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen and Sangha practice talk.

Fall sesshin, October 2022.

Rohatsu sesshin, January 2023.

Administrator, HDS: Lish Troha; **Temple Keeper, PZC:** Patrick Klein; **NL Editor & Layout:** Kendra Martyn; **Editorial Board:** Kathy Ratliffe, Clark Ratliffe and Michael Kieran

Honolulu Diamond Sangha
2747 Waiʻōmaʻo Rd.
Honolulu, HI 96816