

The hundred flowers that come with spring,  
for whom do they bloom?

Hyakka haru itatte ta ga tame ni ka hiraku?

百花春至爲誰開



Setcho offered a poem for the fifth case in the Blue Cliff Record known as "Seppo's Grain of Rice." Seppo says to the assembly, "Pick up the whole great earth in your fingers, and it's as big as a grain of rice. Throw it down before you: if, like a lacquer bucket, you don't understand, I'll beat the drum to call everyone to look."

This is the poem Setcho wrote:

An ox head disappears  
A horse head emerges  
In the mirror of Sokei absolutely no dust  
He beats the drum for you to come look, but you don't see:  
When spring arrives, for whom do the hundred flowers bloom?"

Seppo Gison Zenji (822-908) lived on Seppo Mountain, as the abbot of the temple there. He had trained with Tokusan Zenji, from whom he received transmission. Seppo took a long time to become cultivated. As they say, great vessels are carved from large trees, and large trees take a long time to grow. When he was young, Seppo went three different times to train with Master Tosu Zenji, and he was also with Master Tozan, where he entered the assembly nine times, yet at neither of these places was he truly enlightened. He was so frustrated at his slowness and thickness that he went on a lengthy pilgrimage, offering merits at every opportunity to aid his great vow to break through, no matter what.

He carried a large rice paddle with him on this pilgrimage, and everywhere he went he did the job of cooking rice. He would prepare the rice for hundreds of monks, which is not a simple task; it truly was hard labor. There was no time for zazen, but he did his work with a great mind for the possibility of everyone's awakening. Today one of the names for the kitchen is the Seppo Quarters.

His older brother disciple Ganto was a very advanced monk. Though he was younger than Seppo, Ganto had broken through at an early age; he was quite different in temperament from Seppo. Seppo did his training consistently and without ceasing but couldn't break through.

Ganto and Seppo often travelled together to clarify their true mind. One day, while Seppo and Ganto were on pilgrimage they were snowed in by a blizzard and took shelter at an inn. Since they could not continue their travels, Ganto rolled out his futon and slept. Seppo sat zazen all through the night, working on his state of mind.

At midnight, Ganto awoke and saw that Seppo still had not gone to sleep, Ganto said, "Why don't you stop and go to bed? Lie down and get some sleep." Seppo answered that he was not yet in the state of mind where he could sleep that easily. His deepest mind was still a tangled mess. He told Ganto that even if he lay down, he could not sleep.

Ganto arose and said, "Now what is so difficult? Tell me your state of mind." Seppo explained in detail, describing how when he asked Tokusan "Can this student understand the essence of the ancient teachings?" Tokusan struck him a blow and said, "What are you saying?" At that moment, it was like the bottom falling out of a bucket.

To this Ganto replied vigorously, "Look at what you're saying! The things of true value aren't things that come in from the outside gate!" Seppo asked what was he to do. Ganto replied, "In future, if you want to expound a great teaching, then it must flow forth from your own breast."

When Seppo heard that, he abruptly understood directly, awakening deeply and completely. Spontaneously he prostrated to Ganto, saying, "Today for the first time I have heard the teaching." Thanks to Ganto he had realized kensho for the first time, at the age of forty-nine.

While Seppo had been a rather slow and dull monk, once he did awaken, his function was like a ball of light, and those who trained with him knew his power well. More and more people gathered around him, until there were never fewer than a thousand training with him. Among the forty or more great monks to whom he gave birth were Unmon Bunne Zenji, Gensha Shibi Zenji, Hofuku Juten Zenji, Yosei Dogo Zenji, and Suiga Reitan Zenji.

Seppo Zenji of this Seppo Mountain once said to the assembly gathered there;

"This world, I can pick it up in my fingers and it becomes like a grain of rice in size. I blow, and it disappears somewhere. Please everyone, find and gather it up, ring the bell, beat the drum, come look!"

This whole universe, put into a little pinch, becomes the size of a grain of rice: this is what he said. This is truly huge, beyond conceit or bragging. One who doesn't know may think that's what it is, but such talking about it is useless. But this didn't start with Seppo Zenji.

A similar story is found earlier in the Vimalakirti Sutra:

"The Licchavi Vimalakirti replied, 'Reverend Sariputra, for the Tathagatas and the bodhisattvas, there is a liberation called "Inconceivable." The bodhisattva who lives in the inconceivable liberation can put Sumeru, the king of mountains, which is so high, so great, so noble, and so vast, into a mustard seed.

"He can perform this feat without enlarging the mustard seed and without shrinking Mount Sumeru. And the deities of the assembly of the four Maharajas and of the Trayastrimsa heavens do not even know where they are.

"Only those beings who are destined to be disciplined by miracles see and understand the putting of Sumeru, into the mustard seed. That, reverend Sariputra, is an entrance to the domain of the inconceivable liberation of the bodhisattvas."

This is how Vimalakirti taught. He said that although the Buddhas have satori and liberation, which are inconceivable achievements, if Bodhisattvas can realize this liberation of the Buddhas, then Mount Sumeru can be put into one mustard seed, with this seed not seeming narrow or restrictive, and Mount Sumeru not being twisted or deformed either. All of those Buddhas living on Mount Sumeru, as it is, are also contained in the mustard seed. This is how it's written, and Vimalakirti wasn't just telling tales to make a point.

Our state of mind is like this. If we understand it well, we know how clearly it is expressed here. For example, our eyes are not so large, only about three centimeters wide. Yet those three centimeters can take in the whole universe at a glance. A huge mountain, a great ocean, can fit into our small eyes. How can such a great miracle happen? It's possible because there's a world beyond size, beyond any lens, where there is only emptiness. Mu is not "nothing," but a place where everything that is can settle with no conceived idea of good or bad. It's that huge. It is our mind, our life, our energy.

Our mind holds the entire universe. There's no sense of narrowness, not even when we encounter difficulties. If we encounter them they don't confuse us. We resolve them with spaciousness and simplicity, not with concepts but with our mind's actuality. If we hold on to our ego over and over again we may face things, but we get small and are easily caught.

Setcho says,

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A horse head emerges  
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One after the next each thing appears and disappears. Everything comes in front of the mirror and then disappears, infinitely.

The Sixth Patriarch, Sokei, offered this poem:

There is no Bodhi tree,  
Nor stand of a mirror bright  
Since all is void  
Where can the dust alight?

This bright mirror for which there is no stand is from the origin empty; this mind shows all happenings, with no speck left behind. The sun as well is only the mind's one moment of exercise. All the things of the world are only a moment's appearance in the mirror; this is why we can't find where they went.

Our state of mind is pure from the origin, without one thing added or subtracted. In the spring it's the hundred flowers, and in the autumn, the bright moon. In the summer the cool breeze blows, and in the winter there is snow, so cold, white, and pure.

In the spring these flowers bloom everywhere. For whom do they bloom? They bloom for no one; beyond a self and an other they bloom. Beyond subject and object they bloom. They are of the world beyond division into two, the mysterious world of the not-two. For whom does the breeze of summer blow? For whom does the autumn moon's beauty radiate and shine? For whom is the winter's snow so pure and bright? It's not for our mind or to exist merely as phenomena in the world.

When the world and we become one, each and every phenomenon shines with truth, and this is what all of us have to know with our true inner master. The realization of this truth is the place where we can add in no extra thoughts or ideas, and this is Zen. The ultimate great joy and happiness is present. What could be more joyful than the creation of the heavens and earth, that pure blooming of phenomena into the way of the world?