



Spring mountains are green
Spring rivers are blue

Shunzan wa aoku
Shunsui wa aoshi

These phrases are found in the records of Master Kido.

On a clear day in the rainy season, Bucho Zenji was called by a sweet wind that prevailed upon his heart to travel to Fukugawa in Edo to visit Basho. Basho was pleased to see his friend. He had just been thinking about wanting to take sanzen with Bucho Zenji. Upon hearing the footsteps quickly approaching, he ran outside at once. Seeing each others' faces, both men smiled broadly. Basho then made a sincere request to do sanzen with Bucho Zenji, to express a recent deepening of his mind state.

They then began their exchange. This particular kind of tete-a-tete is known as a mondo. Originally, it was conceived as a bartering tool between a seller and a buyer. The same name is used when the exchange is between a master and a disciple. Here, two Zen monks are exchanging the quality and depth of their states of mind. The particulars of any given exchange are called koans or shogyos.

First Bucho Zenji spoke, "So . . . what is it you have realized?"

How about it, did you make some good money? It's showing all over your face! This was how Bucho Zenji started it off.

"The rain is over, there's a big clear blue sky."

Without pausing, Basho answered that after the rain the sky is clearer than ever. How bright and blue that great clear sky seems after the rain has passed! This bright blue could dye your eyes; it could color all your senses with its piercing hues!

Naturally, Bucho Zenji couldn't allow just that.
"How is it prior to when that green moss grows?
How is it before you even touch that greenness?"

He cut deeply with the sharp blade of inquiry.

Zen teaches of that face, present long before your mother and father were born, that reveals your original true nature. "That awareness prior to the birth of any awareness, prior to God even deciding to create the heavens or the earth, how is that for you?" That place of dying completely to everything in this world, of having realized that boundless state of mind--how is it there? This is the same place as the source of mu before any notions or questions or thoughts can enter; this is the very foundation of our state of mind. It is that place where the heavens and the earth and I are one, where there's not yet any division into good and bad, where I am in no way separated from anyone or anything else, where not one mind moment has been born. How about right there? What is the actual substance of our awareness? This whole world--what gives birth to it and its perception?

If we are careless, we might answer something like emptiness or void. We shouldn't fall into that pit. In Zen, this kind of nihilism is called the dark fox's cave and is severely cautioned against. Turning your back on the pain and suffering in the world, or placing yourself as the center of the world and paying no attention to anything else, is not the Buddha Dharma. If that were the Buddha Dharma, then it would rot. The Buddha Dharma does not sell as cheaply as that! The Buddha Dharma is the activity of liberating all sentient beings in the whole world--it has to be this, or it's not the Buddha Dharma.

The sharp point of Bucho Zenji's scalpel entered without erring. He cut toward that root source of mu. "What is it that is prior even to that great clear blue sky?"

At that moment, Basho heard a frog jump into a nearby pond. With that sound, he broke through that placid surface and dove deep into the pond himself. That sound split his awareness open, and that which was prior to the huge clear blue sky was manifested without any thoughts about it.

Into the old pond
the frog jumps...
plop.

Basho realized completely that truth which is prior to even the great blue sky. No matter what kind of experience you have, the meaning is not in the past. It has to be immediate and on the spot. It has to be born right here, right now, or it is not Zen.

There is no meaning in saying, "I had this experience." Our awareness is changing in every moment. No matter what wonderful experience we might have had, if it becomes a stain on our perceptions it's not the true source. Basho's state of mind expressed the truth of that very moment.

Bucho Zenji said, "If you realize that place, that's good." He confirmed Basho's state of mind.

Into the old pond
the frog jumps
plop.

Basho's poem was born from here. However, this isn't about Basho. It's about the true state of mind in each of us; the actual awareness that's filled with wonder and awe. If it is not like that, we can't give birth to the activity that will liberate all beings. The energy that moves beyond the unending obstructions and gives birth to humans' best can arise only in accordance with this true state of mind.