

Water flows cold from the bamboos' edge
The breeze blows fragrant through the flowers

Mizu wa chikuhen yori nagareidete hiyayaku
Kaze wa kari yori sugikitatte kanbashi

水自竹邊流出冷
風從花裏過來香



The water in the grove of tall, green bamboos is cool and refreshing on hot summer days. The water that comes out of the grove's depths feels cooler than any other. The wind seems much more fragrant after it blows through the mounds of blooming flowers. The world as it is. Yet the water, the bamboo grove, the flowers, and fragrances are NOT what these lines are talking about.

The bamboo is always straight and honest, it is said. It pierces our clear mind with its purity. The flowers each have a fragrance. We have to see their meaning in terms of our mind's essence and our spiritual experience.

Someone with no experience won't understand, no matter what they're told. But with experience, you can understand, and training is the ground of that experience.

Clarifying our true nature to know that deep state of mind is man's challenge. In society selfish desires surface and emotions rule our lives. Our true nature is apart from that.

"In our mind there is a depth so profound that waves of grief and joy cannot reach there," as one ancient poetized. Our mind's true base is able to understand social joys, but it can go deeper than that. The griefs of this world are shallow in comparison to the depths of our mind. We must experience this true base. The Buddha realized mind's source by extinguishing the flames of greed, anger, and ignorance, and the words he used to described it were "the serenity of nirvana."

These three--greed, anger, and ignorance--are what confuse us, leading to the darkness of grumbling and ignorance. But because we are human we can realize the mind where desires don't reach, and know this place. Once we have touched this center, no matter what clouds of ignorance arise, we won't be fooled by them. This is what all beings want. Without this base, society decays.

Humankind has this deep wisdom and huge openness of mind.



Because of this, we don't have to be afraid but can meet every moment's phenomena with our deepest truth. From ancient times until today people have been willing to train to experience this, because knowing it directly is the deep wish of our true mind.

Many leave the path and don't complete their vow. Those who finish are a very small percentage of those who begin. Buddha and the Patriarchs were able to complete this deep vow, and the importance of their example for us is beyond expression. That which humans can't begin to express, the pain and suffering of all of it, is right here.

We want to make our life's value clear, but to do that we've got to let go of all karmic connections and possessions. Not one of the patriarchs pursued this path casually. The Buddha did six years of ascetic training. Niso Eka Daishi, to show his deep determination, cut off his arm and then worked until he opened deeply. In realizing the true source of mind, humans' truest value is made manifest. In each day's work, we have to remember their efforts.

"How many times I have gone down into the Blue Dragon's cave for you!" How much has been given, how much life has been put at stake by those who seek the truth! Those seeking the truth have had to confront the fearful dragon with its necklace of gold. How many times have we had to enter that dragon's deep cave! This is how the ancients spoke of it.

We cry tears of blood. From morning until evening and from evening until morning, tears of blood pour from our eyes. Our legs hurt. We are pulled out of the zendo by senior students and hit by our teacher at sanzen. We sit constantly and continually. Within the pain and sleepiness, we seek to clarify the true mind. Not in social happiness and satisfaction but in suffering, we continue for more years and then even more years.

Only one who's lived through this can know what it means to not be stopped by the extremes of winter, to continue on even with snow and frost covering everything. People who have trained know what it's like to cry alone at how difficult it is. Anyone who has done this knows this state of mind.

Even if we are deeply awakened, we can't think lightly of it and waste time. We can't be indulgent, or our suffering will be useless. This is what these words are teaching us: "How many times I have gone down into the Blue Dragon's cave for you!"

Who is this "you"? For twenty or thirty years, we give our whole life to know our own true clear nature. Only one who's done this can taste the waters that flow cold from the bamboos' edge. Only one with this experience can know the truth of the breeze that blows fragrant through the flowers. No matter what tangled mess comes along, such a person is unmoved by it. Such a person loves everyone as a matter of course.

A monk named Sassa Hokuin trained at Sogenji under Gisan Zenrai Zenji. While he was there, a letter came saying that his home temple north of Kyoto had burned and he needed to return. He was tenzo at that time, and when he read the letter he threw it into the fire saying, "If I go back now I can only help build a temple. I have to go finish my training first. A temple is important, but if I leave my training now it will never be completed." He made this firm vow and put the letter into the fire.

One of his fellow monks told Hokuin that he was astonished at his deep vow and decision. Hokuin had been told to return home and didn't go, while that monk wanted so much to go home,

so much to be free from the strict life of training, that he would have given anything for such a letter to come from his home. He had even asked the priest at his home temple to please write and ask for his return, but the priest hadn't done so. Now Hokuin was told to come and he didn't even want to go. To the monk, Hokuin seemed so advanced!

Master Gisan heard this story and said that, having been born to a poor family and grown up in a poor household, he knew what it was to lead a challenging life and to have to save every drop of water. He had wanted to go to school, but he couldn't leave. Instead he continuously trained and learned humans' best way of being. He understood with his own experience why it's a big job to be alive.



Sassa Hokuin was called in to see the Roshi. "You had a letter from your parent priest, I heard? Why don't you go back?"

The monk replied, "It is not as if the temple won't be built without me. Training is most important. Even if a temple is built, what importance is there in that?"

Gisan heard this and said that, yes, training is important, but what is training for, after all? If it is not for the pain and suffering of society, then it is all only for our own satisfaction. When you have no feeling for others, even if you do training, you will be handicapped.

He told Hokuin, "Here you received a letter saying the priest was in big trouble and wanted you to help, please, and you crumpled that letter up. You burned it in the fire. That will not get you anywhere near that mind of Buddha and Daruma Daishi. Even if you have the doctrine, you'll never be able to know the hugeness of their minds. You'll never know that mind that at one hundred and twenty years of age crossed to China. Even if you finish your training, don't you ever go into the world, or you will leave a soiled mind wherever you go and it will be a detriment to the Buddha Dharma." Master Gisan said it very carefully.

At that, Sassa Hokuin went to Hamasaka on the Japan Sea and never went into the world. From the huge headquarters temple and other places as well, many of excellent character and training came and asked him to help, but still he never went into society.

Nonetheless, as was common in those days, many gathered from the local school and the city offices. They came together and asked Hokuin to speak on Zen. He said, "I am no one to offer any teisho, but I can interpret the words," and he spoke about the Blue Cliff Record.

In the third case, "Master Baso Is Sick," he came to these lines:

For twenty years I have suffered bitterly
How many times I have gone down into the Blue Dragon's cave for you!

When he reached these lines, Hokuin could not speak. Everyone asked what had happened, but he was in tears. All he could say was, "No more today--I quit!"

He stopped the teisho. Among those who had been listening was the child who would be Mumon Roshi's teacher, Seisetsu Roshi. When he heard that, with a child's mind, he said, "This is a strange book if reading it makes you cry." Later, when he went to Tenryuji to train with the very famous Master Gasan, the master taught the Blue Cliff Record.

Every week with many monks gathered and Seisetsu Zenji present, Master Gasan spoke on the Blue Cliff Record. When Gasan got to the third case, Seisetsu wondered what would happen. But Gasan did not cry, and Seisetsu was a little disappointed. Then he forgot all about it. But the second time Gasan did the Blue Cliff Record, even though Seisetsu had forgotten all about it, when Gasan Osho came to "Sun Face Buddha, Moon Face Buddha; What kind of people were the Ancient Emperors! For twenty years I have suffered bitterly; How many times I have gone down into the Blue Dragon's cave for you," he started to cry. Sitting atop the high seat, Gasan wept. That priest who had spoken so strongly could barely continue. His voice got rougher and rougher and his face was so full of tears he could not speak. Finally, he said he was finished for the day and went to his room.

Everyone who heard that was also in tears. The priests and all the monks were looking down and crying so hard they couldn't lift their faces. They had all been through such strong fierce training together, and there, for the first time, the Buddha Dharma stood. Only in that encounter of teacher and disciple can this happen, and only one who has experienced this can speak it. To no one else will it make any sense. But one who has experienced it knows:

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Those who know that depth and hugeness will brim over with understanding. If we train, our deepest base is touched. Then, we will know no more confusion, no matter what we encounter in society, with people's values of good and bad, their illnesses and poverty, and all of the political changes. This is the kind of training we must do.