

# The Sound of Raindrops

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This line is from the forty-sixth case of the Blue Cliff Record, "Kyosei's Sound of Raindrops."



Master Dofu Kyosei, who lived from 868 to 931, received Dharma transmission from Master Seppo. As a young monk, he trained with Gensha Shibi Zenji, working hard, but feeling that he had made no headway in resolving the Great Matter. Finally, so ashamed with his sense of failure, he asked Master Gensha, "Since my arrival here, I've worked very hard, but without any real progress. I don't know where to begin! Where does one enter Zen?"

Master Gensha said, "Can you hear the sound of that stream in the valley?"

The monk answered, "Yes, I hear it very well"

"Good. Then it's best if you enter from there."

From this exchange, Kyosei came to realize the means to his enlightenment. As a teacher, he often used this same approach with his monks.

The patriarchs of old were very kind in this way. Through the rain and the wind, the heat and the cold, they waited for the moment when each monk's practice could ripen and bear fruit. They sought the means that would lead to the opening of the monk's true mind.

Master Kyosei asked another monk, "What sound is that outside the gate?"

"The sound of raindrops."

Kyosei said, "Sentient beings are inverted. They lose themselves and follow after things." He was aggrieved by the monk's answer.

The monk replied, "What about you, Teacher?" He returned the question to his teacher, asking what he would call the sound.

Master Kyosei answered, "I almost don't lose myself."

He was saying that no matter what his circumstances were, he didn't lose his true self.

The monk followed up: "What is the meaning of 'I almost don't lose myself?'"



That which hears the raindrop and that which is being heard are not two separate things. Because I hear it, the raindrop sounds; the raindrop sounds so that I hear it. There aren't two of us. It's much harder to express that state of mind of not-two than it is to give up our attachments to things. It's nearly impossible in the midst of samadhi to speak of the experience itself. But to become the expression of it--that is Zen. It has to be verbalized, and Master Kyosei wanted to awaken this monk. This is why he asked the question.

Master Kyosei had deep compassion and kindness. His answer was not mistaken. As long as we're still aware of a "me," we need to defend ourselves against the world and, because of that, we get used by our surroundings. Those who are used by their surroundings have no true master.

There is no enlightenment in simply saying, "The sound of raindrops." It has to be the true master hearing them fall. This is the great kindness of Master Kyosei, manifested clearly and openly, just as it is.

Kyogen Zenji said that the raindrop doesn't call itself a raindrop. The sound of the raindrop is me; the raindrop and I are one and the same. The same is true for that which is seen and that which is seeing. The flower that I see and the I that sees the flower are one.

A sound has no substance; that which is nothing at all hears the sound. If we think there is an "I" there listening to some thing that is not-I, then we're being moved about by what we think. When we hold on to nothing, we become the sound of the raindrop. The raindrop becomes us, and we fill the heavens and the earth with its sound. This state of mind has to be realized, or we can have no understanding of Zen. The monk asked, "If you do not call it a raindrop, then what do you call it?"

Master Kyosei said, "I almost don't lose myself." His answer is vague because there is no fixed "I" there. Becoming one and the same with the raindrop is Master Kyosei's truth. But the monk doesn't understand. That's why he asks, "What is the meaning of 'I almost don't lose myself'?" He's listening only with his ego and hearing only with that dualistic mind. Master Kyosei is becoming one with the raindrop, one with the heavens and the earth, and here there's no such thing as an ego. Master Kosei has become the raindrop and is falling.

Because this place can't be explained, he says, "I almost don't lose myself." But there's nothing to be lost or not lost in the state of mind that Master Kyosei is manifesting.

To the monk's follow-up, Master Kyosei answered, "Though it still should be easy to express oneself, to say the whole thing has to be difficult."

We sit zazen and cut thoughts. By doing this great cleaning, we go beyond life and death and know freedom from our desires. But it's much more difficult to be among deluded people in our daily lives in society and still remain apart from our desires.

Many have said how difficult it is to continue and sustain our practice. It's easy to experience a place beyond desire and unnecessary thoughts, but can we sustain that state of mind? Can we keep it going during our daily life? Master Kyosei is telling the monk that this is the greatest challenge. He's showing him how to keep his life on the line and dwell in the world of continuous clear mind moments.

"What sound is that outside the gate?"

"The sound of raindrops."

Even though we see with our eyes and hear with our ears, smell with our nose and taste with the mouth, feel with our body, all these fields and sense stores are empty. In the very midst of using our senses and holding on to nothing is that place of continuous clear mind moments. That which is form is emptiness, and that which is emptiness is form.

This clear mind, the mind of the Buddha, is what is most important, and that is what Kyosei is showing the monk. All day, every day, we remain in that place of no gaps, always keeping our focus on our footsteps. This is the true state of mind of mu.

Setcho Zenji adds a poem here -

An empty hall, the sound of raindrops . . .  
Hard to respond, even for an adept.  
If you say he's ever let the streams enter,  
As before you still don't understand.  
Understanding or not understanding  
On South Mountain, on North Mountain,  
more and more downpour.

Our body is truly "An empty hall, the sound of raindrops." Like a deserted house in the mountains, there is no self there. Into that empty hall the rain falls, but who is home to hear the sound?

If the one who is listening and the raindrop that is being listened to are two separate things, then there is a "me" after which I still grasp. Only when there's no speck of any "me" can we know "the sound of raindrops." This state of mind is our awareness, not of a me hearing the raindrop, but of the raindrop itself--drip drip drop-- falling within my body. If we try to understand or explain it, we fall into dualism. Our world is one of direct experience. It can't be divided, it can't be explained, and yet it has to manifest. This is why all that can be said is "drip drip drip, I am falling." This state of mind beyond dualism is what has to be realized all day long.

Every day we are working on mu, whether we're standing, sitting, or lying down. Waking, sleeping, walking, sitting, standing, we keep it going muuuuu-muuuuuu. Everything we see is muuuuuu, everything we hear is muuuuuuuu. Walking is muuu, feeling hot is muu, being cold is muuuuu--from morning until evening we continue. We continue muuuuu without trying to become something in particular. We hear, but there's no me doing the hearing; we see, but there's no me doing the seeing; we taste, but there's no me tasting. We have not invented some "me" and then gotten rid of it. We have become the rain, the flowers, the rivers, the mountains. With everything we see, hear, and touch, we create the heavens and the earth and become one with them, transforming into them.

When Hakuin Zenji heard the dawn bell he was awakened. That bell sounded in the empty hall. The Buddha is said to have awakened when seeing the morning star. The light of the morning star shone into the empty hall, and because the hall was empty, everything became the morning star. Kyogen awoke when he heard the sound of the tile hitting the bamboo. Anyone who knows this empty hall will break through completely.

"What sound is that outside the gate?"

In this way it is realized, and the life energy of the heavens and the earth is touched. But it can't be done with compromised effort, or it becomes something else about somebody else.

We have to work creatively on making ourselves completely empty. For this we have zazen. Everyone when told to become empty says the same thing: What value is this to society? If we're empty inside, how can we possibly work in the world? If we have thrown ourselves away completely, then who's going to liberate society?

For those who are lost in dualistic thinking, this won't make any sense. They will remain preoccupied with a limited idea of a good mind and only be able to work from there. When they experience difficult states of mind, they will not be able to function at all. There is no true liberation for society in that! It is precisely because people can't throw themselves away that there's so much suffering and confusion.

Throw yourself away, open yourself up, liberate yourself, then dive into the middle of society. If you don't do it like this, you won't be able to function there. We have to realize this sound of rain that fills the heavens and the earth, or we will never know true joy.