



i lost the key to the gateless gate

a tribute to zen koans and poetry
by nashid fareed-ma'at (ashi)

based on a translation of

The Gateless Gate
by Mumon Ekai
(translated by Nyogen Senzaki and Paul Reps)

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a beginningless beginning

if there is no beginning
then where am i to begin

riddles are for babies
and my vocabulary
let's the mind think it is grown

think?
ah, smashed bananas
i'll allow this flow to jump into me
midstream
then i don't have to think about
beginnings and endings
i can just
be

When one speaks of koans, where is one to begin. Only metaphors will allow us to come near to describing the original intent of these jewels. Many streams of approaches flowing toward a common convergence: that which is called *zen*, pure silence. This silence

already is, but the incessant noise (activity) of the unrestrained mind veils this pure silence which is awakening itself. So how to quiet the mind, particularly our misuse of it? For some, koans present a means to address this.

Koans are often presented as riddles, sayings, or stories. On the surface level of the mind, these may be valid partial descriptions. But the traditional purpose of koans goes deeper: for the mind that will not quiet itself and settle into pure silence, koans become a means to reveal and point beyond the veils and barriers to pure silence we hold within our own minds. Koans are invitations to a path of dropping all thinking to allow Truth to reveal and realize Itself through the forms we conceive ourselves to be. To move beyond the limitations of thinking, because as vast as such may be it doesn't encompass a drop of reality. To move beyond a knowledge built of the stuff of the mind. To remove the gates we place upon our lives and all of existence by living through the thinking mind. It is the thinking mind which fuels the delusional tendencies by which we: judge; form opinions and expectations; dissect the oneness of reality into separate entities; reduce the vastness and wonder of being by fitting phenomenon into ideas the mind thinks it can understand; use the past to craft concepts of the future that we seek to impose upon the present; and more.

Traditionally, koans are not embraced to be understood -- although there may be some benefit to understanding some koans on the mental level. Instead, the teacher gives the student koans as an opportunity to allow the revelation that reveals itself to manifest within one's encounter with the koan. For many this encounter plays out over time: the student sitting regularly and repeatedly with a koan until the mind, by whatever means, arrives at a state of quietude in which it no longer veils the omnipresent revelation. The diligent student can then see the pattern of one's own mental workings; an

opportunity of such awareness being that one can intervene and restrain the mind when it resorts to its trusty playbook of thinking and forming attachments.

When this omnipresent revelation is realized, this alone can be enough to draw one beyond the veils of the mind into the boundless ocean of wakefulness. The koan can serve as a means for this encounter: ultimately, it is by "experiencing" wakefulness that we stop mentally sleepwalking -- seeking to live life primarily through the mind. Then we are free to be ourselves: not the identity we craft from the stuff of the mind and body, and what these experience in the relative realm; instead that undefinable, sometimes intangible, sometimes spontaneous reality whose fullness is beyond the mind and body yet sustains these.

With this said, perhaps some will embrace this collection not as an intellectual or literary effort, but instead a mystical invitation to something deeper...

Just some quick words on the format of this book. The pillar of this book is an English translation of *The Gateless Gate* by the Zen master Mumon Ekai (Japanese name), who lived from 1183 to 1260 A.D. (He is also known in Chinese as Wu-men Hui-Hai. The translation I use was done by Nyogen Senzaki and Paul Reps, published in 1934. The Gateless Gate presents 48 traditional koans, each followed by commentary and a short poem by Mumon Ekai. It also includes a 49th koan attributed to a student named Amban. I present each koan and commentary followed by original poetic "responses." I use the word "responses" because, as you will see, they vary in tone and approach.

Although some may feel moved to read the entire collection straight-through, this being the approach to modern books, I invite readers to

consider taking a more measured and patient course. Traditionally, students would work with one koan at a time, sitting with it until the teacher felt its purpose was served. Such an approach may be worth considering, especially if embraced within the scope of a holistic spiritual practice that includes daily meditation.

A prayer of gratitude and homage to the masters, students, and other forces who keep the traditional path of koans alive...

nashid



preface

i awoke and suddenly realized
i had lost the key to the gateless gate
it was my duty to report the loss
so i immediately went to my master
hoping he could provide guidance
as to how to find or replace the lost key

he looked at me with a straight face
and said
"well, at least you woke up"
he then closed his eyes
smiled
and rested in the silence of sitting

this is not a path catering to expectations
or imagined urgencies
rather
this is a path
fulfilling the being of the moment
in the moment itself



1. Joshu's Dog

A monk asked Joshu, a Chinese Zen master: "Has a dog
Buddha-nature or not?"

Joshu answered: "Mu."

Mumon added:

To realize Zen one has to pass through the barrier of the patriarchs.
Enlightenment always comes after the road of thinking is blocked. If
you do not pass the barrier of the patriarchs or if your thinking road
is not blocked, whatever you think, whatever you do, is like a tangling
ghost. You may ask: What is a barrier of a patriarch? This one word,
Mu, is it.

If you want to pass this barrier, you must work through every bone in
your body, through every pore of your skin, filled with this question:
What is Mu? and carry it day and night. Do not believe it is the
common negative symbol meaning nothing. It is not nothingness,
the opposite of existence. If you really want to pass this barrier, you
should feel like drinking a hot iron ball that you can neither swallow
nor spit out.

*Has a dog Buddha-nature?
This is the most serious question of all.
If you say yes or no,
You lose your own Buddha-nature.*



oh, what is mu
what words can describe the wordless
 which also permeates each word,
 each syllable
 each speck of thought
that essence of all essences
and thus all manifestations
so obvious it is unseen in everything
and nothing
and beyond

oh look,
already i have gone beyond the question
the monk asked about a dog and buddha nature
and i am drawn beyond
all manifestations to that essence of all essence
joshu was right
mu suffices as a great and profound answer
but who among us lives
the depth of surrender
to understand what is beyond understanding
yet understand that as no understanding at all

just sit with the question
don't be tempted by the answers that come
just sit with the question
and let the question answer you
or should i say
reveal the answer that is truly you
to that
i too just say mu



2. Hyakujo's Fox

Once when Hyakujo delivered some Zen lectures an old man attended them, unseen by the monks. At the end of each talk when the monks left so did he. But one day he remained after they had gone, and Hyakujo asked him: "Who are you?"

The old man replied: "I am not a human being, but I was a human being when the Kashapa Buddha preached in this world. I was a Zen master and lived on this mountain. At that time one of my students asked me whether or not the enlightened man is subject to the law of causation. I answered him: 'The enlightened man is not subject to the law of causation.' For this answer evidencing a clinging to absoluteness I became a fox for five hundred rebirths, and I am still a fox. Will you save me from this condition with your Zen words and let me get out of a fox's body? Now may I ask you: Is the enlightened man subject to the law of causation?"

Hyakujo said: "The enlightened man is one with the law of causation."

At the words of Hyakujo the old man was enlightened. "I am emancipated," he said, paying homage with a deep bow. "I am no more a fox, but I have to leave my body in my dwelling place behind this mountain. Please perform my funeral as a monk." Then he disappeared.

The next day Hyakujo gave an order through the chief monk to prepare to attend the funeral of a monk. "No one was sick in the infirmary," wondered the monks. "What does our teacher mean?"

After dinner Hyakujo led the monks out and around the mountain. In a cave, with his staff he poked out the corpse of an old fox and then performed the ceremony of cremation.

That evening Hyakujo gave a talk to the monks and told them this story about the law of causation.

Obaku, upon hearing the story, asked Hyakujo: "I understand that a long time ago because a certain person gave a wrong Zen answer he became a fox for five hundred rebirths. Now I want to ask: If some modern master is asked many questions and he always gives the right answer, what will become of him?"

Hyakujo said: "You come here near me and I will tell you."

Obaku went near Hyakujo and slapped the teacher's face with his hand, for he knew this was the answer his teacher intended to give him.

Hyakujo clapped his hands and laughed at this discernment. "I thought a Persian had a red beard," he said, "and now I know a Persian who has a red beard."

Mumon added:

"The enlightened man is not subject." How can this answer make the monk a fox?

"The enlightened man is one with the law of causation." How can this answer make the fox emancipated?

To understand this clearly one has to have just one eye.

*Controlled or not controlled?
The same dice shows two faces.
Not controlled or controlled,
Both are a grievous error.*



take heed
all who sit in the master's seat
give the wrong answer
and you may end up
with the bondage of countless rebirths
as a fox
give the correct the answer
and your student may slap you
in your face
it would be a joke if we didn't take this life so seriously

is there any better fate within the cycles of karma
than to be right or wrong
neither is the way
my teacher told me
learn enough about karma
to know that you should seek to get out of it
after that
there is no need to learn anything else about karma

something as simple as answering a question
can have profound lasting outflows
karma's predictability is as fickle as it is precise
for it only begets the cycle of suffering
even if as tastes of pleasure
(even paradise attained will one day be lost)

the fullness of bliss,
which has no opposite,
is beyond right and wrong
is beyond all questions and answers
is beyond

* * *

we prepared the rites of departure for a dead fox
who would have known this corpse
once held the life force of a searching master
the reality of things
sometimes is held discreet behind lesser appearances
how often is the whole story only told
after the story has ended,
but not during the expanse of its occurring

the reality that passes through the story
is not always revealed in the story

an old man hiding in the back
may be on the verge of enlightenment
a fox chasing a hare
may be one living the bodhisattva vows
the vows to extinguish all desires and delusions
the vows to serve all of creation
the vows to master all duty and teachings of truth
the vow to awaken

doubt not that these vows
which culminate in the one vow
cannot be fulfilled

by a fox being dragged through life
pulled by its animal instincts

* * *

my teacher said
every time one of my students "gets it"
it is like a proud slap in the face
it reminds me that i am not the teacher
i only sit in the teacher's seat in service

but if you don't know what this really means
then ask me
and come very near
so i can slap you in the face!
(and hard too!)

❖ ❖ ❖

3. Gutei's Finger

Gutei raised his finger whenever he was asked a question about Zen. A boy attendant began to imitate him in this way. When anyone asked the boy what his master had preached about, the boy would raise his finger.

Gutei heard about the boy's mischief. He seized him and cut off his finger. The boy cried and ran away. Gutei called and stopped him. When the boy turned his head to Gutei, Gutei raised up his own finger. In that instant the boy was enlightened.

When Gutei was about to pass from this world he gathered his monks around him. "I attained my finger-Zen," he said, "from my teacher Tenryu, and in my whole life I could not exhaust it." Then he passed away.

Mumon added:

Enlightenment, which Gutei and the boy attained, has nothing to do with a finger. If anyone clings to a finger, Tenryu will be so disappointed that he will annihilate Gutei, the boy, and the clinger all together.

*Gutei cheapens the teaching of Tenryu,
Emancipating the boy with a knife.
Compared to the Chinese god who pushed aside a mountain
with one hand
Old Gutei is a poor imitator.*



doubt not the power of the teacher's device
respect of it is due, beyond the lowness of imitation
yet what are ignorant students to do
when we know nothing
and imitate the teacher in hope that something will be attained

but there is nothing to attain
absolutely nothing

it is grace that the teachers tolerate our imitation
who among us sit because truth reveals itself
in us every sitting
or any sitting
pitiful imitation of the master who in every sitting,
every breath

truth reveals itself completely unveiled
yet the grace by which they tolerate our imitation
should be graced by the grace of restraint in what we imitate
i imitate my teacher's posture because he shows me how to sit
but i dare not imitate his mannerisms

he has not shown that to me to follow
yet teachers are imitators of the masters
and masters are imitators of the buddhas
and (the forms we call) buddhas are imitators of reality
which imitates nothing

that is the grace of grace
to be delivered from imitation
to just be
even if we play a role in the play of creation

we are all students
we are all teachers
we are all masters

we are all buddhas
we are all reality
find your present place
in this endless cycle of imitators imitating imitators
imitating imitators imitating imitators
who imitate that which imitates nothing
for each place has its right etiquette which if upheld
reveals there is nothing to imitate
just be

when cease in imitating
and just be
the transmission of what it is to be
happens

but who can complain
if a teacher, in correcting the violation of etiquette,
bestows the gift of that transmission which imitates nothing
if one fulfills the course of etiquette to receive grace
or if due punishment delivers the bestowal of grace
grace is grace
and imitates nothing
even if the teacher is a poor imitator
of the grace of transmission

mumon is right to say that gutei cheapens the teaching of tenryu
but what teacher or master
can meet the fullness of grace
even if they are a vessel of its transmission
grace imitates nothing

its ways is to be as it is
now



4. A Beardless Foreigner

Wakuan complained when he saw a picture of an unbearded Bodhidharma: "Why hasn't that fellow a beard?"

Mumon added:

If you want to study Zen, you must study it with your heart. When you attain realization, it must be true realization. You yourself must have the face of the great Bodhidharma to see him. Just one such glimpse will be enough. But if you say you met him, you never saw him at all.

*One should not discuss a dream
In front of a simpleton.
Why has Bodhidharma no beard?
What an absurd question!*



i asked my teacher
what's the big deal
why must every picture of bodhidharma have a beard

my teacher replied
because traveling monks don't pack razors
or at least they didn't in the past

who is this bodhidharma
who walked from india to china by foot
when he could have transversed the whole distance
in a single breath of zazen

(sitting, silence)

the beard is for the journey of the mind
where forms of the patriarchs may appear
to convey without conveying
that the journey is pointless
because you are the destination

when one surrenders the dream of traveling
through the vast limitations of the mind
one "arrives" at that placeless place
from which there is never departure
where there is no meeting because you never left
you are always there
(or should i say "here")
even if you dream to be elsewhere
you are always there
that placeless place
where every master dwells
without a beard or a razor
there is no travel to be made
in the pervading oneness of the heart

if you see anything
that means you are back in the dream of the mind
there you will find significance in insignificant questions
like why bodhidharma has no beard
travel on
and may your travels reveal to you
that the actual destination is your very own heart
where there is nothing to see, but only be
where you will never see bodhidharma's face
because you are bodhidharma

then you can stroke your hand across your chin
to see there is no beard

only a person who hasn't found one's home
embarks on journeys
for when one is home
the beauty of home is all there is
then all travels become
completely unnecessary
because anything you may find abroad
is already within
on the level of essence
from which all manifestations emanate
all is already within
sit here



5. Kyogen Mounts the Tree

Kyogen said: "Zen is like a man hanging in a tree by his teeth over a precipice. His hands grasp no branch, his feet rest on no limb, and under the tree another person asks him: 'Why did Bodhidharma come to China from India?'"

"If the man in the tree does not answer, he fails; and if he does answer, he falls and loses his life. Now what shall he do?"

Mumon added:

In such a predicament the most talented eloquence is of no use. If you have memorized all the sutras, you cannot use them. When you can give the right answer, even though your past road was one of death, you open up a new road of life. But if you cannot answer, you should live ages hence and ask the future Buddha, Maitreya.

*Kyogen is truly a fool
Spreading that ego-killing poison
That closes his pupils' mouths
And lets their tears stream from their dead eyes.*



the master of zen has no need for words
the master's being suffices to answer all questions
and eventually dissolves all questions
silence points to the ultimate answer
or is silence the ultimate answer
hmm...

oh students,
when you see the predicament of those who sit in the teacher's seat
come ready to learn without asking (questions)
come ready to learn without needing (answers)
come ready to follow and submit to the example of those
who have no need for words
and whose role cannot be fulfilled through words

even then our mouths need not be closed even if open
for it is through openness of heart
that silence sits

may i never place my teacher
in the position
of choosing
either to fail by not responding
or die by speaking
for the sake of questions
that usually lose all significance over time

* * *

the ultimate answer to all questions
is to silently die by failing to find the answers
sit there
and an answer will come
for which no question can be posed

❖ ❖ ❖

6. Buddha Twirls a Flower

When Buddha was in Grdhrakuta mountain he turned a flower in his fingers and held it before his listeners. Every one was silent. Only Maha-Kashapa smiled at this revelation, although he tried to control the lines of his face.

Buddha said: "I have the eye of the true teaching, the heart of Nirvana, the true aspect of non-form, and the ineffable stride of Dharma. It is not expressed by words, but especially transmitted beyond teaching. This teaching I have given to Maha-Kashapa."

Mumon added:

Golden-faced Gautama thought he could cheat anyone. He made the good listeners as bad, and sold dog meat under the sign of mutton. And he himself thought it was wonderful. What if all the audience had laughed together? How could he have transmitted the teaching? And again, if Maha-Kashapa had not smiled, how could he have transmitted the teaching? If he says that realization can be transmitted, he is like the city slicker that cheats the country dub, and if he says it cannot be transmitted, why does he approve of Maha-Kashapa?

*At the turning of a flower
His disguise was exposed.
No one in heaven or earth can surpass
Maha-Kashapa's wrinkled face.*

☯ ☯ ☯

why do we seek to reduce truth
to a collection of thoughts and words
a master's life cannot be contained
in the conceptions of striving students
life cannot be contained
in a series of motions and efforts
if i can simply
turn a flower in my hand like the buddha
i will far exceed anything
i think i can learn

the soup is now cold
only because i didn't sip it
when first served
staring at the bread

* * *

there are no secrets
on the only obvious left ignored
because it didn't fit nicely
in how the mind wants to perceive

* * *

how many of us
live to be students
to only receive
what no teaching can transmit

transmission cannot be earned
it happens
when it happens

for reasons that are not reasons
and therefore only confuse the mind

i surrender to the grace of the buddha
i surrender to the grace of wakefulness



7. Joshu Washes the Bowl

A monk told Joshu: "I have just entered the monastery. Please teach me."

Joshu asked: "Have you eaten your rice porridge?"

The monk replied: "I have eaten."

Joshu said: "Then you had better wash your bowl."

At that moment the monk was enlightened.

Mumon added:

Joshu is the man who opens his mouth and shows his heart. I doubt if this monk really saw Joshu's heart. I hope he did not mistake the bell for a pitcher.

It is too clear and so it is hard to see.

A dunce once searched for a fire with a lighted lantern.

Had he known what fire was,

He could have cooked his rice much sooner.



the wordlessness of joshu's words
cannot be put into words
that
which awakened the monk

yet note the words joshu gave
enlightenment does not absolve or bypass
basic acts of duty and etiquette

if you eat a meal, wash your bowl
this is as essential
as going to a master and saying
"teach me"
especially if the teacher opens the door to the heart
prior to you washing the bowl
prior to the washed bowl drying

don't bypass the obvious
in quest of the unperceivable



8. Keichu's Wheel

Getsuan said to his students: "Keichu, the first wheel-maker of China, made two wheels of fifty spokes each. Now, suppose you removed the nave uniting the spokes. What would become of the wheel? And had Keichu done this, could he be called the master wheel-maker?"

Mumon added:

If anyone can answer this question instantly, his eyes will be like a comet and his mind like a flash of lightning.

*When the hubless wheel turns,
Master or no master can stop it.
It turns above heaven and below earth,
South, north, east, and west.*



it is the buddhas
who turn the wheel of the dharma

is a wheel still a wheel if it has no hub
and if it spins without a hub, what is that
if such a wheel is to spin,
it will spin with or without a hub
there are causes
and then what we deem to be necessary for causes to be
among other things we conceive and imagine

but
why are we asking about what-could-have-beens

and should-have-beens
when what is is

the questions we turn our minds over to
that provide answers that will only
necessitate more answers
needing more questions and answers
an endless trip to nowhere perceived to be somewhere
the ultimate answer is to be just as knowing,
just as content
knowing the answer or not

let that wheel spin



9. A Buddha before History

A monk asked Seijo: "I understand that a Buddha who lived before recorded history sat in meditation for ten cycles of existence and could not realize the highest truth, and so could not become fully emancipated. Why was this so?"

Seijo replied: "Your question is self-explanatory."

The monk asked: "Since the Buddha was meditating, why could he not fulfill Buddhahood?"

Seijo said: "He was not a Buddha."

Mumon added:

I will allow his realization, but I will not admit his understanding. When one ignorant attains realization he is a saint. When a saint begins to understand he is ignorant.

It is better to realize mind than body.

When mind is realized one need not worry about body.

When mind and body become one

The man is free. Then he desires no praising.



a buddha that is not a buddha
how can that be
see the abodes a mind seeking understanding
can trespass upon
a buddha is a buddha that fulfills buddhahood

a buddha that does not fulfill buddhahood
such does not exist
but a mind craving understanding
can conceptualize and seek to conceptualize
the existence of that which does not exist
even when it is obvious
that it does not exist

when one is ignorant it is wise to seek understanding
for that is a boat that brings one from the shore of ignorance
but seek that understanding that leads to no understanding
you need not understand to understand everything
you need not understand
just be

when we are fully immersed in the moment
any understanding needed in that moment
will come to us by its own means
but you may be surprised
by how little we need to understand
to be in life's unfolding
despite what the ignorant mind things

* * *

there is a place
between the ignorant opening to understanding
and those who understand
meet me there
even if it is just the width of a shadow of a crumb

underneath a rock on a hidden path
in an undiscovered forest



10. Seizei Alone and Poor

A monk named Seizei asked of Sozan: "Seizei is alone and poor. Will you give him support?"

Sozan asked: "Seizei?"

Seizei responded: "Yes, sir."

Sozan said: "You have Zen, the best wine in China, and already have finished three cups, and still you are saying that they did not even wet your lips."

Mumon added:

Seizei overplayed his hand. Why was it so? Because Sozan had eyes and knew with whom to deal. Even so, I want to ask: At what point did Seizei drink wine?

*The poorest man in China,
The bravest man in China,
He barely sustains himself,
Yet wishes to rival the wealthiest.*



who is not alone and poor
when sitting in zazen
but when the zazen is pure
such solitude reveals everything
the sitter's poverty is wealth immeasurable
but few can hold such a drink uncut

so they build their drinker's gut
with watered down versions
of the best of wines

let not apparent conditions
distract you from the treasures at hand
let not screaming tragedies
move you to neglect the presence of modest blessings
an ounce of pure gold
is worth more than pounds of mixed metals
one drink of the pure wine of zen
is worth more than oceans of mixed drinks

if you are given one pure drink
recognize it as more worthy
than the lesser servings
you may have become accustomed to
don't be a fool who is dying of thirst
while standing in a pool of clear drinking water
don't ask for mounds of copper
when an ounce of the purest gold
has already been placed at your feet

but i agree with mumon
what wine can i drink
that is wine and yet not violate
the inviolable vow forbidding intoxicants
if i have already been served such a drink
let me not take three cups to realize my folly
oh grace, please that bartender who intervenes



11. Joshu Examines a Monk in Meditation

Joshu went to a place where a monk had retired to meditate and asked him: "What is, is what?"

The monk raised his fist.

Joshu replied: "Ships cannot remain where the water is too shallow." And he left.

A few days later Joshu went again to visit the monk and asked the same question.

The monk answered the same way.

Joshu said: "Well given, well taken, well killed, well saved." And he bowed to the monk.

Mumon added:

The raised fist was the same both times. Why is it Joshu did not admit the first and approved the second one? Where is the fault?

Whoever answers this knows that Joshu's tongue has no bone so he can use it freely. Yet perhaps Joshu is wrong. Or, through that monk, he may have discovered his mistake.

If anyone thinks that the one's insight exceeds the other's, he has no eyes.

*The light of the eyes is as a comet,
And Zen's activity is as lightning.
The sword that kills the man
Is the sword that saves the man.*



no answer is the same when the speaker is not the same
even if one asks the same question
when one sincerely sits in zazen for even a second
the waters deepen so that ships can come to stay
glorious transformation

what words can joshu give to teach this
a kind chastisement can point the way
sit (zazen)
waste not the sacred opportunity to sit
for in the quietude of sincere sitting
deepening occurs of itself
especially if the quietude recedes
into silence

in this place of deepening
even the master becomes a student of the student
retaining the beginner's mind
for learning is unending
teaching cannot teach what learning is
one learns from the heart opening to reveal
the omniscience resting within
and others can learn from merely witnessing
the heart opening, the heart's opening
heart to heart transmission
one heart reminding another heart

to not allow its natural openness
to be veiled by anything

the master bows to the student
but beyond the surface of phenomena
the open heart bows to the open heart
a dance upon the perceived duality
that is the oneness of the heart
the oneness that is truth

i too bow to the monk with the raised fist



12. Zuigan Calls His Own Master

Zuigan called out to himself every day: "Master."

Then he answered himself: "Yes, sir."

And after that he added: "Become sober."

Again he answered: "Yes, sir."

"And after that," he continued, "do not be deceived by others."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir," he answered.

Mumon added:

Old Zuigan sells out and buys himself. He is opening a puppet show. He uses one mask to call "Master" and another that answers the master. Another mask says "Sober up" and another, "Do not be cheated by others." If anyone clings to any of his masks, he is mistaken, yet if he imitates Zuigan, he will make himself fox-like.

*Some Zen students do not realize the true man in a mask
Because they recognize ego-soul.
Ego-soul is the seed of birth and death,
And foolish people call it the true man.*



have you the purity of humility
to allow the master and the student
to live in what you perceive to be your self

the master's words come from the same place
whether uttered through another body
or through your own voice
but have you the humility
to surrender to the master's words
despite the means of delivery
too often we ignore the master's words
 spoken through our own voice
thinking we have to be a master
to heed them
yet when the master speaks
in whatever way it comes
we would be wise to live the master's guidance

beyond the pieces and the board
is what the game is all about
although this is played through the game,
 the pieces, and the board
be careful
do not confuse the game,
 the pieces, and the board
for what the game is truly about



13. Tokusan Holds His Bowl

Tokusan went to the dining room from the meditation hall holding his bowl. Seppo was on duty cooking. When he met Tokusan he said: "The dinner drum is not yet beaten. Where are you going with your bowl?"

So Tokusan returned to his room.

Seppo told Ganto about this. Ganto said: "Old Tokusan did not understand ultimate truth."

Tokusan heard of this remark and asked Ganto to come to him. "I have heard," he said, "you are not approving my Zen." Ganto admitted this indirectly. Tokusan said nothing.

The next day Tokusan delivered an entirely different kind of lecture to the monks. Ganto laughed and clapped his hands, saying: "I see our old man understands ultimate truth indeed. None in China can surpass him."

Mumon added:

Speaking about ultimate truth, both Ganto and Tokusan did not even dream it. After all, they are dummies.

*Whoever understands the first truth
Should understand the ultimate truth.
The last and first,
Are they not the same?*



how many of us
seek to have what we call the ultimate truth
fit within our understanding and preferences
even the phrase "ultimate truth"
what is that
does truth make distinctions among itself
as to what is ultimate or not
or is it foolish humans
who seek to impose this distinction

will i myself become a dummy
who responds to this by saying
truth is one and indivisible

i'd rather keep my tongue in tokusan's empty bowl
and hide my quietude behind ganto's laughter and clapping



14. Nansen Cuts the Cat in Two

Nansen saw the monks of the eastern and western halls fighting over a cat. He seized the cat and told the monks: "If any of you say a good word, you can save the cat."

No one answered. So Nansen boldly cut the cat in two pieces.

That evening Joshu returned and Nansen told him about this. Joshu removed his sandals and, placing them on his head, walked out.

Nansen said: "If you had been there, you could have saved the cat."

Mumon added:

Why did Joshu put his sandals on his head? If anyone answers this question, he will understand exactly how Nansen enforced the edict. If not, he should watch his own head.

*Had Joshu been there,
He would have enforced the edict oppositely.
Joshu snatches the sword
And Nansen begs for his life.*



i left my sandals in the shadow of the bodhi tree
therefore, how can i place them on my head
to save the cat's life

whatever it takes to save all sentient beings
short of violating the precepts

but to give no reply?
can that be acceptable for one who takes
the bodhisattva vows

oh well,
i better watch my neck
until i retrieve my sandals
nansens and joshus have been known
to lurk in unseemingly unsuspecting places

and would i be a hypocrite
to beg for my own life
if i did not beg for the cat's life

perhaps only joshu's sandals
and nansen's sword know the answer

if an answer exists...



15. Tozan's Three Blows

Tozan went to Ummon. Ummon asked him where he had come from.

Tozan said: "From Sato village."

Ummon asked: "In what temple did you remain for the summer?"

Tozan replied: "The temple of Hoji, south of the lake."

"When did you leave there?" asked Ummon, wondering how long Tozan would continue with such factual answers.

"The twenty-fifth of August," answered Tozan.

Ummon said: "I should give you three blows with a stick, but today I forgive you."

The next day Tozan bowed to Ummon and asked: "Yesterday you forgave me three blows. I do not know why you thought me wrong."

Ummon, rebuking Tozan's spiritless responses, said: "You are good for nothing. You simply wander from one monastery to another."

Before Ummon's words were ended Tozan was enlightened.

Mumon added:

Ummon fed Tozan good Zen food. If Tozan can digest it, Ummon may add another member to his family.

In the evening Tozan swam around in a sea of good and bad, but at dawn Ummon crushed his nut shell. After all, he wasn't so smart.

Now, I want to ask: Did Tozan deserve the three blows? If you say yes, not only Tozan but every one of you deserves them. If you say no, Ummon is speaking a lie. If you answer this question clearly, you can eat the same food as Tozan.

*The lioness teaches her cubs roughly;
The cubs jump and she knocks them down.
When Ummon saw Tozan his first arrow was light;
His second arrow shot deep.*



they wear pretension upon their robes

better to wander aimlessly in a forest
lost and confused
than to wander with pretension
from monastery to monastery
from teacher to teacher
from trophy to trophy
in a landscape of celebrated delusion

is one blow enough
to stop you
from waddling in the superficial
upon a path that points
to the endless depths within
the heart
if one blow is not enough

can you bear two or even three
before you become oblivious to all blows
and ignorance more firmly takes root

pierce beyond all pretension
seek the heart
better to never leave your room
and be turned toward awakening
than to travel to the ends of the universe
in a dream one never awakens from
be still and surrender
to let truth find you in life as it is
instead of seeking truth in a life
that takes you further from truth
even if such seeking is made
in a decorated robe of the sangha



16. Bells and Robes

Ummon asked: "The world is such a wide world, why do you answer a bell and don ceremonial robes?"

Mumon added:

When one studies Zen one need not follow sound or color or form. Even though some have attained insight when hearing a voice or seeing a color or a form, this is a very common way. It is not true Zen. The real Zen student controls sound, color, form, and actualizes the truth in his everyday life.

Sound comes to the ear, the ear goes to sound. When you blot out sound and sense, what do you understand? While listening with ears one never can understand. To understand intimately one should see sound.

*When you understand, you belong to the family;
When you do not understand, you are a stranger.
Those who do not understand belong to the family,
And when they understand they are strangers.*



with tradition comes the temptation of imitation
and we may conform to be brought
to the precipice of what tradition points to
but for those who will cross the threshold
beyond surface and appearance
it is wise to know the inherent purpose of rites
not merely perform them because they are prescribed

why do you do perform rites
really -- why?
if your reason is not genuine to your present being
you risk being ensnared in the trap
of lifeless imitation
the tradition can point to life
when it is lived in the *now*
then to understand or not understand
all the implications of the rites
becomes inconsequential

the tradition belongs to the family
and the family are those who genuinely uphold and live
what the tradition is
now
even if such persons are strangers



17. The Three Calls of the Emperor's Teacher

Chu, called Kokushi, the teacher of the emperor, called to his attendant: "Oshin."

Oshin answered: "Yes."

Chu repeated, to test his pupil: "Oshin."

Oshin repeated: "Yes."

Chu called: "Oshin."

Oshin answered: "Yes."

Chu said: "I ought to apologize to you for all this calling, but really you ought to apologize to me."

Mumon added:

When old Chu called Oshin three times his tongue was rotting, but when Oshin answered three times his words were brilliant. Chu was getting decrepit and lonesome, and his method of teaching was like holding a cow's head to feed it clover.

Oshin did not trouble to show his Zen either. His satisfied stomach had no desire to feast. When the country is prosperous everyone is indolent; when the home is wealthy the children are spoiled.

Now I want to ask you: Which one should apologize?

*When prison stocks are iron and have no place for the head,
the prisoner is doubly in trouble.
When there is no place for Zen in the head of our generation,
it is in grievous trouble.
If you try to hold up the gate and door of a falling house,
You also will be in trouble.*



when the teacher calls for you
what is being called
a body, a mind, a phenomena, an idea
or something deeper

when you call me
(not what appears to be me)
don't call me by a name
that will only confuse
this confused mind and body

for when *that* is called
i know not to be limited
to the doldrums of repeated etiquette
and with such clarity
i will respond
in complete spontaneity

is that not why i am called to zazen
life lives in the unscripted moment
if not, why then do i answer
the call to sit in silence



18. Tozan's Three Pounds

A monk asked Tozan when he was weighing some flax: "What is Buddha?"

Tozan said: "This flax weighs three pounds."

Mumon added:

Old Tozan's Zen is like a clam. The minute the shell opens you see the whole inside. However, I want to ask you: Do you see the real Tozan?

*Three pounds of flax in front of your nose,
Close enough, and mind is still closer.
Whoever talks about affirmation and negation
Lives in the right and wrong region.*



how do you answer a question
that cannot be answered
you don't
the question itself takes one beyond
what the question seeks
but if you arrive at that placeless place
where there are no questions
in quietude of mind
you may discover what the question seeks
not as an answer that can be given
but a reality that reveals itself

just like
three pounds of flax
these words won't answer the question
nor even try



19. Everyday Life Is the Path

Joshu asked Nansen: "What is the path?"

Nansen said: "Everyday life is the path."

Joshu asked: "Can it be studied?"

Nansen said: "If you try to study, you will be far away from it."

Joshu asked: "If I do not study, how can I know it is the path?"

Nansen said: "The path does not belong to the perception world, neither does it belong to the non-perception world. Cognition is a delusion and non-cognition is senseless. If you want to reach the true path beyond doubt, place yourself in the same freedom as sky. You name it neither good nor not-good."

At these words Joshu was enlightened.

Mumon added:

Nansen could melt Joshu's frozen doubts at once when Joshu asked his questions. I doubt though if Joshu reached the point that Nansen did. He needed thirty more years of study.

*In spring, hundreds of flowers; in autumn, a harvest moon;
In summer, a refreshing breeze; in winter, snow will accompany you.
If useless things do not hang in your mind,
Any season is a good season for you.*



"the path does not belong to the perception world"
it is not something to study,
but live
 in the moment
yet if we do not study,
our perceptions often only lead us further astray
set your delusions to point you in the direction of truth
embrace wise restraints to prepare your table for freedom

the wise study
to set a place for that
which cannot be studied
that which reveals itself
through living it
but it will not reveal itself
 to one not ready to receive it
even if such readiness is made in the space of delusion
find that middle ground
between the delusion of learning
and the senselessness of stupidity
there is a space between the breath of these
a stillness between the motions
of the inhalation of learning
and exhalation of foolishness
be open to the freedom that reveals itself
in living this space of stillness
for then, even aspects of the motions of breath
can serve this pervading stillness
and thus, the path can unfold at times
within the inhalations and exhalations
even as it draws one beyond these

may i be fortunate to have thirty more years of study
and perhaps one year of stupidity
to be brought to the point nansen reached
or was drawn to



20. The Enlightened Man

Shogen asked: "Why does the enlightened man not stand on his feet and explain himself?" And he also said: "It is not necessary for speech to come from the tongue."

Mumon added:

Shogen spoke plainly enough, but how many will understand? If anyone comprehends, he should come to my place and test out my big stick. Why, look here, to test real gold you must see it through fire.

*If the feet of enlightenment moved, the great ocean would overflow;
If that head bowed, it would look down upon the heavens.
Such a body has no place to rest. . . .
Let another continue this poem.*



"if the feet of enlightenment moved, the great ocean would overflow;
if that head bowed, it would look down upon the heavens.
such a body has no place to rest. . . ."
yet its mercy allows the appearance of motions
in its stillness
the appearance of being
in its transcending all existence

explain what you will
but this is beyond explanation

now i must go see mumon
to see if the appearance of this body and mind
can survive the test of his big stick
without overflowing the ocean



21. Dried Dung

A monk asked Ummon: "What is Buddha?"

Ummon answered him: "Dried dung."

Mumon added:

It seems to me Ummon is so poor he cannot distinguish the taste of one food from another, or else he is too busy to write readable letters. Well, he tried to hold his school with dried dung. And his teaching was just as useless.

*Lightning flashes,
Sparks shower.
In one blink of your eyes
You have missed seeing.*



at least the dung
was dry
and not...
never mind

when the logic
of our questions
imprison us
sometimes the only key
is to respond
with stupidity

hopefully only one year
of stupidity
will be enough
to get me through
or beyond
thirty years of study



22. Kashapa's Preaching Sign

Ananda asked Kashapa: "Buddha gave you the golden-woven robe of successorship. What else did he give you?"

Kashapa said: "Ananda."

Ananda answered: "Yes, brother."

Said Kashapa: "Now you can take down my preaching sign and put up your own."

Mumon added:

If one understands this, he will see the old brotherhood still gathering, but if not, even though he has studied the truth from ages before the Buddhas, he will not attain enlightenment.

*The point of the question is dull but the answer is intimate.
How many persons hearing it will open their eyes?
Elder brother calls and younger brother answers,
This spring does not belong to the ordinary season.*



true successorship is not a matter of desire or gifts
it is destiny waving its curvy finger
but if you desire or wish to be given successorship
put up a sign
it works for parking lots

* * *

take my word for this, if you wish
only those who do not know
what successorship calls for
want or seek it

but almost all who realize
and are willing to surrender to
what successorship calls for
these rarely choose successorship
but the choice is not theirs to make

how many days did shakymuni buddha
sit under the bodhi tree
in full awakening
before surrendering to the choice
destiny made for him,
for us

the best memorial of the master
is not shrines, or words, or ceremonies,
or even reverence
the best memorial is
humbly living what the master teaches to perfection
(all true lessons are everlasting)
obedience to the master is a timeless memorial
which if upheld, never decays
almost everything else
is dust disappearing into the wind

but you can still put up a sign
for a parking lot



23. Do Not Think Good, Do Not Think Not-Good

When he became emancipated the sixth patriarch received from the fifth patriarch the bowl and robe given from the Buddha to his successors, generation after generation.

A monk named E-myo out of envy pursued the patriarch to take this great treasure away from him. The sixth patriarch placed the bowl and robe on a stone in the road and told E-myo: "These objects just symbolize the faith. There is no use fighting over them. If you desire to take them, take them now."

When E-myo went to move the bowl and robe they were as heavy as mountains. He could not budge them. Trembling for shame he said: "I came wanting the teaching, not the material treasures. Please teach me."

The sixth patriarch said: "When you do not think good and when you do not think not-good, what is your true self?"

At these words E-myo was illumined. Perspiration broke out all over his body. He cried and bowed, saying: "You have given me the secret words and meanings. Is there yet a deeper part of the teaching?"

The sixth patriarch replied: "What I have told you is no secret at all. When you realize your own true self the secret belongs to you."

E-myo said: "I was under the fifth patriarch many years but could not realize my true self until now. Through your teaching I find the source. A person drinks water and knows himself whether it is cold or warm. May I call you my teacher?"

The sixth patriarch replied: "We studied together under the fifth patriarch. Call him your teacher, but just treasure what you have attained."

Mumon added:

The sixth patriarch certainly was kind in such an emergency. It was as if he removed the skin and seeds from the fruit and then, opening the pupil's mouth, let him eat.

*You cannot describe it, you cannot picture it,
You cannot admire it, you cannot sense it.
It is your true self, it has nowhere to hide.
When the world is destroyed, it will not be destroyed.*



here's a secret of the obvious secret
so obvious it is transparent before our searching eyes
but that is not the secret i wish to share
here it is:
watermelon!
is it pink or red

okay, here is the secret
within the phrases
"do not think good"
and
"do not think not-good"
is a treasure that strips all veils
to nakedness of our true self

who has the courage to be exposed
yet not ashamed
before the entire universe
good or not-good
do not think
and be naked

but still,
i think the more important matter is
is watermelon pink or red

* * *

don't think
(there it is again)
(laughter)
don't think
that just because it is a symbol
that it is without significance or weight
the perfect symbol
what it points to
weighs more than all the mountains
in the all universes
in all times

what the perfect symbols
unerringly point to
it is for the sake of this
that they are protected
so that only the chosen hands can lift them
imitate what you will
there is no substitute for the genuine

keeper of the lineage
who is and yet is also more than a symbol

realize that which doesn't hide but is hidden
(more often by the ignorance of the mind)
and there will be no need for symbols
nor any need for the world to be destroyed



24. Without Words, Without Silence

A monk asked Fuketsu: "Without speaking, without silence, how can you express the truth?"

Fuketsu observed: "I always remember springtime in southern China. The birds sing among innumerable kinds of fragrant flowers."

Mumon added:

Fuketsu used to have lightning Zen. Whenever he had the opportunity, he flashed it. But this time he failed to do so and only borrowed from an old Chinese poem. Never mind Fuketsu's Zen. If you want to express the truth, throw out your words, throw out your silence, and tell me about your own Zen.

*Without revealing his own penetration,
He offered another's words, not his to give.
Had he chattered on and on,
Even his listeners would have been embarrassed.*



the idea of truth can be general
but the realization of truth in this world
is always specific
to this moment,
to this mind,
to existence as it is now,
within the present conditions

if that calls for words, then speak
if that calls for quiet, then be quiet
if that calls for silence,
then be still and melt into truth itself
awareness is the guide

understand the metaphor
my realization of truth cannot be your realization
and my realization cannot help you
 unless something in you will be inspired by that
but when you arrive at realization
you will see the limits of these linear words
and in silence realize
that what we call "my" realization
and what we call "your" realization
is neither mine nor yours
but simply is
the oneness of truth

the realization of truth
lives in living, not expression



25. Preaching from the Third Seat

In a dream Kyozan went to Maitreya's Pure Land. He recognized himself seated in the third seat in the abode of Maitreya. Someone announced: "Today the one who sits in the third seat will preach."

Kyozan arose and, hitting the gavel, said: "The truth of Mahayana teaching is transcendent, above words and thought. Do you understand?"

Mumon added:

I want to ask you monks: Did he preach or did he not?

When he opens his mouth he is lost. When he seals his mouth he is lost. If he does not open it, if he does not seal it, he is 108,000 miles from truth.

*In the light of day,
Yet in a dream he talks of a dream.
A monster among monsters,
He intended to deceive the whole crowd.*



when we dream of a dream within a dream
can we speak anything other than dreamed words
can we think anything other than dreamed thoughts
dream the invitation for your sermon,
if you wish
teach what you will

but this path
is the path of awakening

wake up
let your sleepy ass wake up
then you will see
if you should preach or not
anything less than this
is dreamed deception
even if dreamed
with the best of intentions

how many days
did shakya muni buddha
sit under the bodhi tree awake
before he began teaching
don't dream the answer
let it awaken in you
if you are called to teach
within this dream



26. Two Monks Roll Up the Screen

Hogen of Seiryō monastery was about to lecture before dinner when he noticed that the bamboo screen lowered for meditation had not been rolled up. He pointed to it. Two monks arose from the audience and rolled it up.

Hogen, observing the physical moment, said: "The state of the first monk is good, not that of the other."

Mumon added:

I want to ask you: Which of those two monks gained and which lost? If any of you has one eye, he will see the failure on the teacher's part. However, I am not discussing gain and loss.

*When the screen is rolled up the great sky opens,
Yet the sky is not attuned to Zen.
It is best to forget the great sky
And to retire from every wind.*



what is good, what is bad
can it be so easily deciphered by the judging mind
what is observable, what is not observable
are not consistent indicators of what is right
and what is wrong
and why even be concerned with such judgements
only miners of merit dig for such coal
but the inheritors of the awakened ones
have been foretold

that there are endless treasures
within the heart
awaiting you

but if you work so hard for a piece of coal
you may not be willing to burn it
in the fire of releasing all merit

there is nothing to attain
there is nothing to gain or lose
but there may be some illusions and attachments to release
maybe...



27. It Is Not Mind, It Is Not Buddha, It Is Not Things

A monk asked Nansen: "Is there a teaching no master ever preached before?"

Nansen said: "Yes, there is."

"What is it?" asked the monk.

Nansen replied: "It is not mind, it is not Buddha, it is not things."

Mumon added:

Old Nansen gave away his treasure-words. He must have been greatly upset.

*Nansen was too kind and lost his treasure.
Truly, words have no power.
Even though the mountain becomes the sea,
Words cannot open another's mind.*



no matter what i say or what i do
nothing can awaken you but you
but maybe, just maybe
another's words or action,
or a master's grace
can encourage you
to stop dreaming so hard

when you stop dreaming
you can effortlessly awaken

* * *

what's the point
of collecting innovative dream stuff
if you wish to awaken
whether it's new
or has been said millions of times before
the dream is a dream
and the dream will never seek to stop dreaming

ah, stop trying to innovated delusion
that only keep you ignoring reality



28. Blow Out the Candle

Tokusan was studying Zen under Ryutan. One night he came to Ryutan and asked many questions. The teacher said: "The night is getting old. Why don't you retire?"

So Tokusan bowed and opened the screen to go out, observing: "It is very dark outside."

Ryutan offered Tokusan a lighted candle to find his way. Just as Tokusan received it, Ryutan blew it out. At that moment the mind of Tokusan was opened.

"What have you attained?" asked Ryutan. "From now on," said Tokusan, "I will not doubt the teacher's words."

The next day Ryutan told the monks at his lecture: "I see one monk among you. His teeth are like the sword tree, his mouth is like the blood bowl. If you hit him hard with a big stick, he will not even so much as look back at you. Someday he will mount the highest peak and carry my teaching there."

On that day, in front of the lecture hall, Tokusan burned to ashes his commentaries on the sutras. He said: "However abstruse the teachings are, in comparison with this enlightenment they are like a single hair to the great sky. However profound the complicated knowledge of the world, compared to this enlightenment it is like one drop of water to the great ocean." Then he left that monastery.

Mumon added:

When Tokusan was in his own country he was not satisfied with Zen although he had heard about it. He thought: "Those Southern monks say they can teach Dharma outside of the sutras. They are all wrong. I must teach them." So he traveled south. He happened to stop near Ryutan's monastery for refreshments. An old woman who was there asked him: "What are you carrying so heavily?"

Tokusan replied: "This is a commentary I have made on the Diamond Sutra after many years of work."

The old woman said: "I read that sutra which says: 'The past mind cannot be held, the present mind cannot be held, the future mind cannot be held.' You wish some tea and refreshments. Which mind do you propose to use for them?"

Tokusan was as though dumb. Finally he asked the woman: "Do you know of any good teacher around here?"

The old woman referred him to Ryutan, not more than five miles away. So he went to Ryutan in all humility, quite different from when he had started his journey. Ryutan in turn was so kind he forgot his own dignity. It was like pouring muddy water over a drunken man to sober him. After all, it was an unnecessary comedy.

*A hundred hearings cannot surpass one seeing,
But after you see the teacher, that one glance cannot surpass
a hundred hearings.*

*His nose was very high
But he was blind after all.*



who needs a candle to walk through the darkness of night
seeing is not limited to sight
the nature of seeing is more expansive
and even more expansive than this
is the wakefulness of being (awake)
pervading beyond the most vast conception of allness
need is only a portent of the dream
wakefulness expands beyond the limitations of need
beyond all limitations and endlessness

external light only alights what is outward
what light but that inner light can illumine reality's way
when this is realized to be so
who needs a candle to move through
the blinding veils of ignorance

when we realize
that what we think we need we don't (need)
the mind opens to what is beyond the mind
and its (limiting) thinking
then you will realize that even *that*
pervades the veils of thinking
and need is only a delusion that veils
the allness you already are
what do you need
when you have all(ness)

gratitude to the masters
who help their students realize this
even if through the means
of an unnecessary comedy

* * *

have you made a single hair more important than the sky
or a drop of water more important than the ocean
it is we who reduce the heavens
to a fragment of hair from the head
it is we who reduce the deepening oceans
to a drop within arm's reach
yet blame not the hair or the drop
for even if you limit the expanses to these
be keen in observing and you will see
that the hair points to the sky
which expands into the ascending heavens
and the drop points to the water
which becomes the deepening ocean
and that these point beyond to that great beyond
that is so beyond
it is everywhere
and yet nowhere
with a clarity that dissolves all confusion
it is here right now
only awaiting our awakening

i look to the master
who guides me to awaken to awakening
even if through the means
of unnecessary sideshows and jokes

* * *

you need not light to see light
even blindness to the world will suffice
for the unfolding of realization

where are the days
when an act of a master's grace
shows a closed mind openness
we are drowning in our own enlightenment
but ignore the gift of these waters
for fear of what the closed mind perceives not

most of us live
on an island of ignorance
surrounded by the ocean of awareness

let not a single act of a master's grace
escape your appreciative mind
any act of a master
even an apparent trivial one
may be a gift that dissolves all the mind's barriers
one act may reveal
more than what lifetimes of spiritual practice unveil
yet once revealed,
the gift is gone
because then, even then
a mind open to the "reality" of the dream
may keep its eyes shut
to an opportunity to wake up

wakefulness
is beyond and yet encompasses the dream
the veils of the dream are so delusive
wakefulness
the master can guide you to the threshold
but not bring you across to
an awakening you must awaken to yourself
even the brightest candlelight is darkness compared to this

when one comes to realize this
for one's self
beyond thoughts and concepts and dreamed understanding
one needs not wake up
for awakening happens on its own
even if the dreamer still dreams the remnants of dreams
dreaming their last fragments of finality



29. Not the Wind, Not the Flag

Two monks were arguing about a flag. One said: "The flag is moving."

The other said: "The wind is moving."

The sixth patriarch happened to be passing by. He told them: "Not the wind, not the flag; mind is moving."

Mumon added:

The sixth patriarch said: "The wind is not moving, the flag is not moving. Mind is moving." What did he mean? If you understand this intimately, you will see the two monks there trying to buy iron and gaining gold. The sixth patriarch could not bear to see those two dull heads, so he made such a bargain.

*Wind, flag, mind moves,
The same understanding.
When the mouth opens
All are wrong.*



is the mind the phenomenon it perceives
i will not give my mind such pomp of circumstance
but in everything the mind perceives
the nature of the mind is revealed
see the hue of the veil as it colors objects
and you can see how the veil veils
more clearly than trying to see the veil itself

because the veil is too close to the eye
and when you see how the veil that veils everything veils
you see
how every object you see and what they appear to be
are nothing more than the mind
not the objects seen perse
but sight (perception) is the mind
for what would you see if you had no mind

ah,
now we've stumbled onto a question
worth contemplating

i'm not sure if that all makes sense
but as mumon said
when the mouth opens
when the mind gets to thinking
and explaining
all are wrong
everything gets screwy



30. This Mind Is Buddha

Daibai asked Baso: "What is Buddha?"

Baso said: "This mind is Buddha."

Mumon added:

If anyone wholly understands this, he is wearing Buddha's clothing, he is eating Buddha's food, he is speaking Buddha's words, he is behaving as Buddha, he is Buddha. This anecdote, however, has given many a pupil the sickness of formality. If one truly understands, he will wash out his mouth for three days after saying the word Buddha, and he will close his ears and flee after hearing "This mind is Buddha."

Under blue sky, in bright sunlight,

One need not search around.

Asking what Buddha is

Is like hiding loot in one's pocket and declaring oneself innocent.



if the question is misguided
how can it arrive at the destination it seeks

such questions are fine
to get the lazy person up and moving
but once the journey has begun
set all questions aside
and do not pick them back up
the sincere journey will suffice

to present the necessary questions
that will guide you to a destination
beyond all destinations

p.s.

if you invite the unenlightened mind to be the buddha...
need i say anything more
baso is not wrong
but don't wrongly misconstrue his reply
in fact, don't even ask the question
just sit with it in silence
(zazen)



31. Joshu Investigates

A traveling monk asked an old woman the road to Taizan, a popular temple supposed to give wisdom to the one who worships there. The old woman said: "Go straight ahead." When the monk proceeded a few steps, she said to herself: "He also is a common church-goer."

Someone told this incident to Joshu, who said: "Wait until I investigate." The next day he went and asked the same question, and the old woman gave the same answer.

Joshu remarked: "I have investigated that old woman."

Mumon added:

The old woman understood how war is planned, but she did not know how spies sneak in behind her tent. Old Joshu played the spy's work and turned the tables on her, but he was not an able general. Both had their faults. Now I want to ask you: What was the point of Joshu's investigating the old woman?

When the question is common

The answer is also common.

When the question is sand in a bowl of boiled rice

The answer is a stick in the soft mud.



rare is the affair that warrants our inquiry
unless it is a matter of direct duty
yet the prevailing duty
is to realize the truth of who one is

the truth of wakefulness
this duty requires one's complete attention
not the distraction of others' affairs
before you go off investigating others
investigate yourself,
even the delusion of your own ego

even the wise must learn
and relearn this sacred lesson
in order to surrender the whole of one's life
to this precious fragrance

yet know
and trust
that where there is deepening sincerity
even the faults of others prove to be guides
that serve the fulfillment of our primary duty
even a fool
can foolishly serve the role of a master
when our sincerity is firmly rooted
and our focus not distracted from our primary duty

who are you
and are you awake yet
if not, investigate why this is so
before you investigate anything else
yet know
if you are willing to surrender everything
and just be
there is no need to investigate anything

surrender will take you to and beyond
what any investigation reveals



32. A Philosopher Asks Buddha

A philosopher asked Buddha: "Without words, without the wordless, will you tell me truth?"

The Buddha kept silence.

The philosopher bowed and thanked the Buddha, saying: "With your loving kindness I have cleared away my delusions and entered the true path."

After the philosopher had gone, Ananda asked the Buddha what he had attained.

The Buddha replied: "A good horse runs even at the shadow of the whip."

Mumon added:

Ananda was the disciple of the Buddha. Even so, his opinion did not surpass that of outsiders. I want to ask you monks: How much difference is there between disciples and outsiders?

*To tread the sharp edge of a sword,
To run on smooth-frozen ice,
One needs no footsteps to follow.
Walk over the cliffs with hands free.*



disciples come for teaching and guidance
but genuine seekers come to be

and what can convey what it is to be
other than to be
this is beyond the duality of words
beyond what words and what no words can convey
this is beyond what disciples can perceive
for so much of the domain of teaching and guidance rest
within the domain of the duality of words

but don't be harsh toward words
until one arrives at the readiness to be
wisdom within the domain of the duality of words
is not a bad thing to seek
just don't confuse an elevated pass on the mountain
as being the summit
what the genuine seeker realizes
is beyond what most disciples attain
unless the disciple is or becomes
a genuine seeker

* * *

if you come to the buddha for a lesson
out of compassion,
the awakened one will grant a lesson
may you have the means to perceive such teaching

if you come to the buddha for guidance
out of love,
the awakened one may guide you
the wise do not guide those
who are not yet ready to be guided
may you be ready if you are called to such a path

but if you come to the buddha to be shown truth
the buddha will put aside all lessons and guidance
and simply be
for the awakened one, to be is truth
and when you are shown truth
you stop seeking truth
for then it is shown that you are truth

you are the destination of your seeking

so release all the obstacles
veiling and deluding this destination
even your seeking
and, like the buddha, just be
surrender to
the path laid within
to the heart
that innermost essence
that peace bliss reality
that is
(truth)

❖ ❖ ❖

33. This Mind Is Not Buddha

A monk asked Baso: "What is Buddha?"

Baso said: "This mind is not Buddha."

Mumon added:

If anyone understands this, he is a graduate of Zen.

*If you meet a fencing-master on the road, you may give
him your sword,*

If you meet a poet, you may offer him your poem.

When you meet others, say only a part of what you intend.

Never give the whole thing at once.



are we back with baso
answering questions
about what is the buddha
in regards to the mind

here, baso
i give you all my questions
to be free from them
so that i no longer seek with questions
answers that cannot be given
only realized

but wait, didn't mumon say
don't give the whole thing at once

now i'm really confused
perhaps this confusion is closer to truth
than any answer to any of my questions

i'm trying to tell you
there's something to this
zazen

p.s.
i left my zen degree at the university
do you think they can mail it to me



34. Learning Is Not the Path

Nansen said: "Mind is not Buddha. Learning is not the path."

Mumon added:

Nansen was getting old and forgot to be ashamed. He spoke out with bad breath and exposed the scandal of his own home. However, there are a few who appreciate his kindness.

*When the sky is clear the sun appears,
When the earth is parched rain will fall.
He opened his heart fully and spoke out,
But it was useless to talk to pigs and fish.*



when you are done being a master
or being a disciple
just be
then nansen's words will be revealed in you
in a way that they need not be said

yes, etiquette is not the path either
but useful nonetheless
don't wake a person who is sleeping
don't expose a fool to its stupidity
don't reveal delusion as delusion
for even these serve as filters
that protect precious treasures
from those who are not sincere

or not yet ready
to receive them

in fact,
forget that you even read this koan
if you can
you'll be better off
for nothing in this koan or the words that follow it
are buddha or the mind
it's like speaking human words
to pigs and fish who live another language
(silent laughter)



35. Two Souls

"Seijo, the Chinese girl," observed Goso, "had two souls, one always sick at home and the other in the city, a married woman with two children. Which was the true soul?"

Mumon added:

When one understands this, he will know it is possible to come out from one shell and enter another, as if one were stopping at a transient lodging house. But if he cannot understand, when his time comes and his four elements separate, he will be just like a crab dipped in boiling water, struggling with many hands and legs. In such a predicament he may say: "Mumon did not tell me where to go!" but it will be too late then.

*The moon above the clouds is the same moon,
The mountains and rivers below are all different.
Each is happy in its unity and variety.
This is one, this is two.*



the moonlight pervading the night sky
is the same as the light illuminating the pond's water
yet the moon sphere in the sky
is not the same as the reflected sphere in the water

do we really need to understand
the consistently changing inconsistencies
of phenomena
to allow the consistently changing inconsistencies

of phenomena
to occur and be observed as they appear

openness of mind
is less challenging than the burden of understanding
things that challenge understanding
where there is openness
one can simply be
and allow phenomena to be
as they are until they no longer are
but you, the essence you are
remains unchanged in being
even as the forms you occupy
flow with the changing flow of phenomena

whether seijo is two or one or none
with any or none being the true soul
i simply am
and she can be or not be as she is
what is neither affirms or negates what is happening,
what is possible
even as what is happening,
what is possible
affirms and negates what is, was, will be, and could be
in consistently inconsistent ways

realize oneness even within duality
(and multiplicity)
and never be confused by duality's confusion
ever again



36. Meeting a Zen Master on the Road

Goso said: "When you meet a Zen master on the road you cannot talk to him, you cannot face him with silence. What are you going to do?"

Mumon added:

In such a case, if you can answer him intimately, your realization will be beautiful, but if you cannot, you should look about without seeing anything.

*Meeting a Zen master on the road,
Face him neither with words nor silence.
Give him an uppercut
And you will be called one who understands Zen.*



when you meet a zen master on the road
when and if that happens
that is the time to consider what to do
in the moment
it will be revealed
but will you be attentive enough
to realize this revelation
such an approach is more appropriate than
premeditated words
a fabricated quietude we call silence
or, as mumon suggested,
an unprovoked uppercut

but maybe a better question is
if you meet a zen master
how will you know that one
to be a master of zen
oh, i forgot
i already gave all my questions to baso
ignore what i just said



37. A Buffalo Passes Through the Enclosure

Goso said: "When a buffalo goes out of his enclosure to the edge of the abyss, his horns and his head and his hoofs all pass through, but why can't the tail also pass?"

Mumon added:

If anyone can open one eye at this point and say a word of Zen, he is qualified to repay the four gratifications, and, not only that, he can save all sentient beings under him. But if he cannot say such a word of true Zen, he should turn back to his tail.

*If the buffalo runs, he will fall into the trench;
If he returns, he will be butchered.
That little tail
Is a very strange thing.*



what does a city dweller know about buffalo tails
let someone else explain
but if i have brought everything but my tail
past the edge of the abyss
and stop
what little, unseen things might i be holding on to
that keep me within the enclosure

for the diligent seeker
it's usually not the big obvious obstacles
but the small subtle ones

that keep one at the threshold of liberation
but not crossing beyond

my master said
delusion has not by the head
not even by the torso or the limbs
but by the tail
that's why so few of us
see our bondage to delusion
but if we get real still
we might feel it

but like i said,
what does a city dweller know about buffalo tails
let someone else explain
if an explanation is needed



38. An Oak Tree in the Garden

A monk asked Joshu why Bodhidharma came to China.

Joshu said: "An oak tree in the garden."

Mumon added:

If one sees Joshu's answer clearly, there is no Shakyamuni Buddha before him and no future Buddha after him.

Words cannot describe everything.

The heart's message cannot be delivered in words.

If one receives words literally, he will be lost,

If he tries to explain with words, he will not attain enlightenment in this life.



a mind in harmony with truth
harmonizes all it perceives with truth
a mind that is not in harmony with truth
well, you can let someone else explain that

teaching words are a paradox
they seek to explain what cannot be explained
by revealing that *that* cannot be explained
not directly, not on the surface of the language
but by subtly acknowledging what the choice of language reveals
see if you will
the motivating obstacles that present the questions
and how we seek to fit *that* which cannot be explained

into the mental space of inquiry
that is boundless and cannot be contained
even by the most vast and perfect mind
and if it cannot be contained how can it be understood
just as the sun's light cannot be seen directly by the eyes
the light is revealed by what it illumines
ah, but we focus on the illumined objects
and make these the points of questions
turning our attention away from *that*

when one genuinely realizes this
inadequate path of inquiry
one stops seeking understanding
which only turns one away from *that*
and if a teacher chooses to offer
repeated nonsensical replies to reveal this
see the point of this
so you can stop being distracted from *that*

how far must the teacher take you from the destination
until you realize the destination is within
that you are *that* very destination
ideas of this are one thing
genuine realization of this is more vast
words and ideas are but fragments of illumination
not the light itself
not *that*



39. Ummon's Sidetrack

A Zen student told Ummon: "Brilliance of Buddha illuminates the whole universe."

Before he finished the phrase Ummon asked: "You are reciting another's poem, are you not?"

"Yes," answered the student.

"You are sidetracked," said Ummon.

Afterwards another teacher, Shishin, asked his pupils: "At what point did that student go off the track?"

Mumon added:

If anyone perceives Ummon's particular skillfulness, he will know at what point the student was off the track, and he will be a teacher of man and Devas. If not, he cannot even perceive himself.

*When a fish meets the fishhook
If he is too greedy, he will be caught.
When his mouth opens
His life already is lost.*



two people are sleeping
one awakens, the other remains asleep
does the waking of the awakened one
help the dreamer awaken

and
if the dreamer, in its dream,
dreams of awakening
will this dream of awakening
help the dreamer
wake up

the path of silent sitting
is not a path of dreaming of awakening
or adorning dreams with the "stuff of wakefulness"
put aside words and thoughts
so that in stillness
you may realize awakening for yourself

when others awaken it can be encouraging
and support you to deepen your approach
but until you awaken for yourself
you will only have dreams
and dreams are only a sidetrack to awakening
because dreams do not awaken

realize
how the things
you think you need to understand
in the dream
are obstacles and barriers to
the awareness that unveils
when awakening reveals itself
will you ignore this revelation
being consumed with the stuff of dreams
if so,
get a thick cushion
and sit quietly

be a welcoming, attentive invitation
to the revelation of awakening
that pervades even the dream

oh, the language of dreams
cannot speak the fullness
of what wakefulness is
instead still the dream
and experience for yourself
(your own)
awakening



40. Tipping Over a Water Vase

Hyakujo wished to send a monk to open a new monastery. He told his pupils that whoever answered a question most ably would be appointed. Placing a water vase on the ground, he asked: "Who can say what this is without calling its name?"

The chief monk said: "No one can call it a wooden shoe."

Isan, the cooking monk, tipped over the vase with his foot and went out.

Hyakujo smiled and said: "The chief monk loses." And Isan became the master of the new monastery.

Mumon added:

Isan was brave enough, but he could not escape Hyakujo's trick. After all, he gave up a light job and took a heavy one. Why, can't you see, he took off his comfortable hat and placed himself in iron stocks.

*Giving up cooking utensils,
Defeating the chatterbox,
Though his teacher sets a barrier for him
His feet will tip over everything, even the Buddha.*



don't fall for mumon's trick
about hyakujo's trick
does tipping over a vase
say what it is without calling its name

but when destiny waves its curvy finger
few can escape
even if isan called the vase a vase
he would have been appointed
as the head of the new monastery

but hyakujo's trick does point out
something destiny's curvy finger will turn away from
the desire for destiny's bounties
the repellent of ambition
these the finger of destiny will curve away from

the want to be is a greater barrier than avoidance
yet neither approaches the surrender
that allows destiny to unfold
the chief monk's answer speaks of desire and ambition
to be a teacher
but fate responds to his wooden shoe
with a bare foot tipping over the symbol
of the reward he sought
(a finger bent by a curve)

as long as the chief monk retains
the desire and ambition to teach
destiny's finger will turn the fate of teaching away from him
any destined outcomes to become a true teacher
will bend to another's fate
even if he dons the teacher's robe
and crafts an imitation of teaching
the essence of what a teacher is
will not rest within him

the fulfillment of destiny lays not in wants
but in surrender, acceptance, and service

surrender all desire
accept whatever destiny presents
serve in the duty of selflessness
and respond accordingly when necessary
with this approach
allow destiny's curvy finger to have free reign
with this thing we call life
the treasure of this is not always revealed in appearance
but sometimes in a sweetness of being
that is beyond words and ideas
and surely beyond the limitations of desire

and be sure
to thank any teacher
that curves its finger, its teaching
to reveal this to you
with this, even the tipping over of rewards
will allow, open to the revelation of
the buddha's light
through the reflecting crystals of destiny



41. Bodhidharma Pacifies the Mind

Bodhidharma sits facing the wall. His future successor stands in the snow and presents his severed arm to Bodhidharma. He cries: "My mind is not pacified. Master, pacify my mind."

Bodhidharma says: "If you bring me that mind, I will pacify it for you."

The successor says: "When I search my mind I cannot hold it."

Bodhidharma says: "Then your mind is pacified already."

Mumon added:

That broken-toothed old Hindu, Bodhidharma, came thousands of miles over the sea from India to China as if he had something wonderful. He is like raising waves without wind. After he remained years in China he had only one disciple and that one lost his arm and was deformed. Alas, ever since he has had brainless disciples.

*Why did Bodhidharma come to China?
For years monks have discussed this.
All the troubles that have followed since
Came from that teacher and disciple.*



the problem with the unsettled mind
is not that it is unsettled
but instead that we seek to settle that
which is unsettled

accept the unsettling
be within it

even if you must bear it
and you will see
that even the longest gust of wind
comes to rest in stillness
and when that stillness is revealed
ah, don't forget it
for all motion of the wind
only dances upon that pervading stillness
a stillness that is always here
even when the motion of the wind appears to conceal it
to restrain the unsettled mind
may be necessary to prevent further harm
but it's not necessary to settle
what is unsettled

but instead
if you can take hold of your mind
to bring it to your teacher
oh, that is enough
just by holding it in a form you can hold
you will see that it will pacify itself
its endless motions resting
in a form your hands can grasp

oh, the grace of the masters
who endure so many hardships
often more than what is acknowledged
those who embrace lifetimes of hard struggle
for the sake of serving just one disciple

many are the brainless fools
who take up shade under the tree of dharma
weeds of pretenders
growing among the sparse blades of good grass
but since their roots are still entangled
the master gardener refrains
from uprooting those that leech upon what is good

the gardener cares for all
in order to care for the few
who are due what good plants are entitled to

the gardener knows there will be trouble in the land
because there are too many weeds
for the sake of loving compassion
countless weeds are sustained
so that the good grass can become
beds to precious, beautiful flowers

just to hear bodhidharma's name is a great blessing
just to hear of shakymuni budddha is a great blessing
just to get a fragrance of the holy dharma is a great blessing
why then after receiving these treasures
would we fall short of upholding the standard of the sangha
of a being a jewel of refuge among the other jewels
(the buddha, the dharma, the masters)
why would we fall short of living to be
a humble yet magnificent blade of grass
 sustained and illuminated by living the middle way
why then, after receiving these sacred treasures,
would we continue to be selfish brainless fools
who dress our ignorance in spiritual facades
but not our lives in living the teachings

if bodhidharma only had one disciple
i surrender to be his second
to not forsake these precious treasures
even if i must be the only pure blade of grass
among an expanding field of stinkweeds

oh, buddha
guide me to not forsake your grace
to not even bring a drop of selfishness
as i turn toward your light...



42. The Girl Comes Out from Meditation

In the time of Buddha Shakyamuni, Manjusri went to the assemblage of the Buddhas. When he arrived there, the conference was over and each Buddha had returned to his own Buddha-land. Only one girl was yet unmoved in deep meditation.

Manjusri asked Buddha Shakyamuni how it was possible for this girl to reach this state, one which even he could not attain. "Bring her out from Samadhi and ask her yourself," said the Buddha.

Manjusri walked around the girl three times and snapped his fingers. She still remained in meditation. So by his miracle power he transported her to a high heaven and tried his best to call her, but in vain.

Buddha Shakyamuni said: "Even a hundred thousand Manjusris could not disturb her, but below this place, past twelve hundred million countries, is a Bodhisattva, Mo-myō, seed of delusion. If he comes here, she will awaken."

No sooner had the Buddha spoken than that Bodhisattva sprang up from the earth and bowed and paid homage to the Buddha. Buddha directed him to arouse the girl. The Bodhisattva went in front of the girl and snapped his fingers, and in that instant the girl came out from her deep meditation.

Mumon added:

Old Shakyamuni set a very poor stage. I want to ask you monks: If Manjusri, who is supposed to have been the teacher of seven

Buddhas, could not bring this girl out of meditation, how then could a Bodhisattva who was a mere beginner?

If you understand this intimately, you yourself can enter the great meditation while you are living in the world of delusion.

One could not awaken her, the other could.

Neither are good actors.

One wears the mask of god, one a devil's mask.

Had both failed, the drama still would be a comedy.



oh mumon
why place what is so simple as a mystery
it is not for the gentle glory of wisdom
to disturb any samadhi
even if that wisdom appears as a master
but delusion,
even as a beginner,
can disturb anyone's samadhi

oh those who rest in the zen of za,
the silence of sitting,
take guard from delusion
for just a speck of the dust of delusion
can topple whole kingdoms
resting in the way
and if you wisely guard
your resting in the way
be absolutely sure
to not disturb others
resting in the way

for even a speck of dust of careless delusion
can disrupt the deepest resting in samadhi
(it doesn't always
but the potential is there)

it is a grace
that manjusri's great powers
could not disturb the girl in samadhi



43. Shuzan's Short Staff

Shuzan held out his short staff and said: "If you call this a short staff, you oppose its reality. If you do not call it a short staff, you ignore the fact. Now what do you wish to call this?"

Mumon added:

If you call this a short staff, you oppose its reality. If you do not call it a short staff, you ignore the fact. It cannot be expressed with words and it cannot be expressed without words. Now say quickly what it is.

*Holding out the short staff,
He gave an order of life or death.
Positive and negative interwoven,
Even Buddhas and patriarchs cannot escape this attack.*



if faced with the choice
of opposing reality
or ignoring a fact
i relinquish both choices
to allow silence to choose itself
for silence expresses what words
can and cannot express
and yet it
cannot be expressed without words
but to "hear" it,
to realize it
requires a humble quietude

that dissolves all answers
to reveal the ultimate answer
that dissolves all questions
even of fools and masters alike

sit in silence
and see if the short staff
has any lasting significance



44. Basho's Staff

Basho said to his disciple: "When you have a staff, I will give it to you.
If you have no staff, I will take it away from you."

Mumon added:

When there is no bridge over the creek the staff will help me. When I
return home on a moonless night the staff will accompany me. But if
you call this a staff, you will enter hell like an arrow.

*With this staff in my hand
I can measure the depths and shallows of the world.
The staff supports the heavens and makes firm the earth.
Everywhere it goes the true teaching will be spread.*



wherever the spiritual journey may take me
the grace of my master is my providence

when traveling the shallows and heights of the world
and a staff is needed to maintain balance
and a firm footing
whether i buy a staff
am given a staff
find a staff
or receive it through other means
regardless of how the staff appears to come
it is from my master

when the smooth plains are reached
and no staff is necessary
to tread the even ground
whether i leave the staff at the edge of the rough terrain
or give it away
or it departs through some other means
regardless of how these happenings transpire
again, it is my master's work

if my master provides everything i need
and removes whatever is not necessary
why should i concern myself with things
there is enough within the journey that warrants my attention
yet even the journey is not all that it seems to be
for the innermost essence within is the destination
we only journey through ignorance back to remembrance
we only journey outward seeking
until we realize for ourselves
that the world is a dream that dreams
in a space within our wakefulness

but i still thank my master
for providing the staff when it is needed
and taking it away when it is not
i still thank my master for its providence
and guidance
even if these are only portents of a dream



45. Who Is He?

Hoen said: "The past and future Buddhas, both are his servants. Who is he?"

Mumon added:

If you realize clearly who he is, it is as if you met your own father on a busy street. There is no need to ask anyone whether or not your recognition is true.

Do not fight with another's bow and arrow.

Do not ride another's horse.

Do not discuss another's faults.

Do not interfere with another's work.



who is the one
to whom
the past and future buddhas
are servants
forget that question:
 who are you?

oh, but wait
maybe the answer is the same
for do not the all the buddhas
of all time and timelessness
serve us with unending compassion
everlasting guidance

even if in ways the ignorant mind
doesn't always recognize

but this is all babble
find out who you are
and everybody and everything else
is effortlessly revealed
in an unerring clarity
that even the most clear words
and confusing doubts
cannot approach



46. Proceed from the Top of the Pole

Sekiso asked: "How can you proceed on from the top of a hundred-foot pole?" Another Zen teacher said: "One who sits on the top of a hundred-foot pole has attained a certain height but still is not handling Zen freely. He should proceed on from there and appear with his whole body in the ten parts of the world."

Mumon added:

One can continue his steps or turn his body freely about on the top of the pole. In either case he should be respected. I want to ask you monks, however: How will you proceed from the top of that pole? Look out!

*The man who lacks the third eye of insight
Will cling to the measure of the hundred feet.
Such a man will jump from there and kill himself,
Like a blind man misleading other blind men.*



no matter how great the accomplishment
there is something greater
until one proceeds beyond all proceeding
to realize
there is nothing to attain
yet this is not a call to inaction
for with insight
even beneficial accomplishments
can purify one to reveal
the state of no attainment

to be more yielding of all merits
to be more strong through humility
to be more selflessly unselfish
to be more true to truth
 until all there is is truth (absolute)

if we must serve
there should be accomplishments
but with each accomplishment
how will you proceed
this proves to be more valuable
than the accomplishment itself
since all accomplishments are fleeting
but genuine transformation endures
to the revelation of the changeless



47. Three Gates of Tosotsu

Tosotsu built three barriers and made the monks pass through them. The first barrier is studying Zen. In studying Zen the aim is to see one's own true nature. Now where is your true nature?

Secondly, when one realizes his own true nature he will be free from birth and death. Now when you shut the light from your eyes and become a corpse, how can you free yourself?

Thirdly, if you free yourself from birth and death, you should know where you are. Now your body separates into the four elements. Where are you?

Mumon added:

Whoever can pass these three barriers will be a master wherever he stands. Whatever happens about him he will turn into Zen.

Otherwise he will be living on poor food and not even enough of that to satisfy himself.

*An instant realization sees endless time.
Endless time is as one moment.
When one comprehends the endless moment
He realizes the person who is seeing it.*



the first barrier
if what i'm studying is not removing the veils
that conceal and distract from (my) true nature

burn all my books and lessons in a smoky bonfire
and toast all my ideas like charred marshmallows on a stick
true nature is not something that can be seen
nor learned
nor fixated to a place
by which one can answer the question
of where it is
but to say this is one thing
to live this is reality

the second barrier
does freedom need to free itself
from that which appears to imprison it
the prison doors have not binding locks
although they click when shut
the clicks are echoes of delusion playing upon itself
and the walls are holograms that have no substance
you can walk through them at anytime!
is there really a need to free that which is already free
even such attempts at freedom become bondage
but to say this is one thing
to live this is reality

the third barrier
if i cannot be fixated to a place of where i am
there is no where where i am
even if i appear to be somewhere
in this self-deluding dream of delusion
the third barrier rests upon the first and second ones
and if these are no barriers
then the third is a puffy cloud
no more binding than unlocking doors, clever holograms,
and charred marshmallows roasting on a stick

walk through it all and see
there are no barriers
stop surrendering to illusions and just be
or sit in silent stillness
and let stillness bring you beyond
to this revelation revealing itself
even the dream will surrender
to (your) awakening
but to say this is one thing
to live this is reality

now some may embrace these words as ideas
imagined bars of a phony prison cell
but those who genuinely live what these words point to
ah, that is unspeakable...



48. One Road of Kembo

A Zen pupil asked Kembo: "All Buddhas of the ten parts of the universe enter the one road of Nirvana. Where does that road begin?"

Kembo, raising his walking stick and drawing the figure one in the air, said: "Here it is."

This pupil went to Ummon and asked the same question. Ummon, who happened to have a fan in his hand, said: "This fan will reach to the thirty-third heaven and hit the nose of the presiding deity there. It is like the Dragon Carp of the Eastern Sea tipping over the rain-cloud with his tail."

Mumon added:

One teacher enters the deep sea and scratches the earth and raises dust. The other goes to the mountain top and raises waves that almost touch heaven. One holds, the other gives out. Each supports the profound teaching with a single hand. Kembo and Ummon are like two riders neither of whom can surpass the other. It is very difficult to find the perfect man. Frankly, neither of them know where the road starts.

*Before the first step is taken the goal is reached.
Before the tongue is moved the speech is finished.
More than brilliant intuition is needed
To find the origin of the right road.*



the right road
it begins and ends where you are
ah, but where are you
that's another question altogether...

or is it...

the question conceals the ultimate answer
that there is no answer to be had
yet that doesn't stop us
from trying to fit the inconceivable
into conceptions we wish to understand and master
to be told this
usually doesn't deter our intelligent stupidity
so a teacher may give a stupid answer
to give us a chance
to see the stupidity of our inquiry for ourselves
such realization points to the quietude of mind
that surrenders to be open to the revelation
of wakefulness



49. Amban's Addition

Amban, a layman Zen student, said: "Mumon has just published forty-eight koans and called the book Gateless Gate. He criticizes the old patriarchs' words and actions. I think he is very mischievous. He is like an old doughnut seller trying to catch a passerby to force his doughnuts down his mouth. The customer can neither swallow nor spit out the doughnuts, and this causes suffering. Mumon has annoyed everyone enough, so I think I shall add one more as a bargain. I wonder if he himself can eat this bargain. If he can, and digest it well, it will be fine, but if not, we will have to put it back into the frying pan with his forty-eight also and cook them again. Mumon, you eat first, before someone else does:

"Buddha, according to a sutra, once said: 'Stop, stop. Do not speak. The ultimate truth is not even to think.'"

Amban added:

Where did that so-called teaching come from? How is it that one could not even think it? Suppose someone spoke about it then what became of it? Buddha himself was a great chatterbox and in this sutra spoke contrarily. Because of this, persons like Mumon appear afterwards in China and make useless doughnuts, annoying people. What shall we do after all? I will show you.

Then Amban put his palms together, folded his hands, and said: "Stop, stop. Do not speak. The ultimate truth is not even to think. And now I will make a little circle on the sutra with my finger and add [to] that five thousand other sutras and Vimalakirti's gateless gate all are here!"

If anyone tells you fire is light,

Pay no attention.

When two thieves meet they need no introduction:

They recognize each other without question.



if mumon plays amban's game
he will never win
the cards are fixed and the dealer is a cheater
playing with counterfeit house money
and the cops are on his payroll

but if amban plays mumon's game
he cannot lose
even the confusion we create
by trying to figure out koans
can be cashed in at wisdom's cash booth

but wait:
stop, stop
do not speak
the ultimate truth is not even to think
i think i see a thief cashing in
the chips i lost at mumon's poker game

but wait,
didn't the buddha say to not even think
(silent laughter)



closing

i said again to my master
i lost the key to the gateless gate

and he said
"ah, no worries
people are losing the key to that all the time
that's why we made it gateless
so that even those who lose their keys
or have no keys
will not be barred entry"

and so i asked
why then call it a gate

and he said
"ask those who think they need a key
to enter
i only refer to it
when someone asks me about it"

and so i asked
well, should i get the key replaced

and he said
"only if you will bar yourself entry
by not having a key
the gateless gate bars no one
but as as for the mind...
well, a topic for another time

when the mind is not consumed with things
it thinks it needs keys for"

and then i left



i lost the key to the gateless gate: a tribute to zen koans and poetry.
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