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Chapter 6

Te-shan Carrying His Bundle

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If you attain the fundamental point, then you perceive the meaning of a pure white cow on open clear ground.

If you don't stay here but move beyond this scene, then you perceive the meaning of a relaxed old cow who lies in the grass and chews its cud.

*Going beyond these two, you arrive at a realm where concepts like form and emptiness have no meaning and subject and object are no longer a hindrance. But what is the meaning?
Haabbh!!*

If someone is thirsty, take them to the kitchen and kindly offer them a glass of milk.
.....

Case 4 in the *Blue Cliff Record* is “Te-shan Carrying His Bundle.” The story says:

When Te-shan arrived to visit Kuei-shan, he carried his bundle with him into the dharma room, where he crossed from east to west and from west to east. He looked around and said, “There’s nothing, nothing.” Then he went out.

Hsueh Tou added the comment, “Completely exposed.”

But when Te-shan got to the monastery gate, he said, “I shouldn’t have been so brash.” So he composed himself properly to meet Kuei-shan. As Kuei-shan sat there, Te-shan held up his sitting mat and said, “Master!”

Kuei-shan reached for his whisk.

Then Te-shan shouted KATZ!, whirled with his sleeves trailing, and left.

Hsueh Tou added the comment, “Completely exposed.”

Te-shan turned his back on the dharma room, put on his grass shoes, and left.

That evening, Kuei-shan asked the head monk, “Where is that newcomer who just came?”

The head monk answered, “At that time he turned his back on the dharma room, put on his grass shoes, and left.”

Kuei-shan said, “Hereafter that lad will go to the summit of a solitary peak, build himself a grass hut, and go on cursing the Buddhas and slandering the Patriarchs.”

Hsueh Tou added the comment, “Adding frost on the snow.”¹

A teaching of Zen Master Fo-yan relates to this case. He called it the two diseases. The first disease is to ride an ass in search of an ass. You look for something outside yourself that you already have near at hand, that you are already at one with. That’s a very important point, or attitude, in terms of Zen practice—formal meditation practice and even informal meditation-in-action practice. If you are practicing

sitting meditation with an attitude that you want to become something other than what you already are, that is a disease. But if you are sitting just to wake up to the fact that you are already complete, then your practice direction is clear. So that is the first disease, to ride an ass in search of an ass.

The second disease is to ride an ass and refuse to dismount. In this case, you're clear about what you've got under you, what you're at one with. You've already perceived or attained some degree of stillness and have entered into this fundamental point, but you've become attached to that, and in that attachment you've begun to lose your way. That's what he means by the second disease. Fo-yan then stated the final attitude or correct direction as to not ride at all. That means you are already the ass. The whole world is also the ass. The whole world then becomes your playground or the manifestation of the field of practice, everywhere in everything at all times.

There are two characters here: Zen Master Kuei-shan (Isan; Wi Sahn) and Zen Master Te-shan (Tokusan; Dok Sahn). Kuei-shan (771–853) began to study the sutras as well as the texts connected with a monk's discipline when he entered a monastery at age fifteen. But then when he was about 23 years old, he felt that this direction was not getting him where he wanted to go. So upon hearing about Zen Master Pai-chang (Hyakujo; Baek Jang), he made a journey to meet him. Pai-chang perceived Kuei-shan as a good vessel and accepted him as his student.

One night when Kuei-shan was attending the master, Pai-chang asked, "Who are you?" Kuei-shan replied, "I'm Kuei-shan." Then Pai-chang said, "Poke the firepot and see if there's a bit of live charcoal in there." Kuei-shan went to the firebox and took a poker or tongs and poked around but couldn't find a glowing ember, so he said to Pai-chang, "The fire is completely out." You may realize that Pai-chang was not talking about charcoal and fire here, but Kuei-shan did not consciously recognize that his teacher was trying to point him toward his own fundamental aliveness.

Pai-chang then stood up, dug deep in the firepot, pulled out a small piece of glowing charcoal, and held it up in front of Kuei-shan and said, "Is this not it?" (Some translations say, "Just this, you see?") And at that moment—*ptchh*—Kuei-shan had a realization.

Kuei-shan was then in his mid-twenties and, after this experience, having realized some live fire within himself, nevertheless he stayed on at Pai-chang's monastery for another 20 years. That's an important point in terms of one's attitude toward practice, sincerity, and not being in a hurry.

In Pai-chang's monastery, Kuei-shan served as head cook, or rice steward, a highly responsible job.

When Kuei-shan was in his forties, a diviner came to the monastery and said to Pai-chang, "If you were to establish a monastery on Mount Kuei, that would be a very good practice place, and many people would come and attain to the Zen dharma. But that practice place on the high peak of Mount Kuei is not suitable for you yourself, Zen Master, so you should pick somebody else to go."² Everybody thought that the head monk would get the job. And the head monk himself thought that he was entitled to the position.

Pai-chang said to the assembly, "Anyone who can pass the test will become the abbot of Kuei-shan." He took a urine bottle and set it down on the floor saying, "This is not a urine bottle. What then can you call it?" The head monk stepped forward and said, "It can't be called a wooden block."

Then Kuei-shan came forward and—*plaff!*—kicked over the urine bottle and walked out. Pai-chang said, "The head monk has been defeated by Kuei-shan." Kuei-shan would become the abbot of the monastery.

In his mid-to-late-forties, Kuei-shan went to Mount Kuei, but he didn't build a temple there. He didn't gather any students around himself, nor did he teach anything. He just built a small hut and practiced. It is said that he just practiced for seven or eight years. Gradually some people began to notice him there, and a congregation developed around him. Then a government official donated money to build a temple. Kuei-shan eventually had a community of over fifteen hundred monks. He went there and built himself a little hut, nothing spectacular, nothing to grab anyone's attention, and just practiced for some time. Gradually the sincerity and energy of his practice drew people to him.

Much later, when Kuei-shan had grown old, he said to his assembly, "When I die, I will be reborn as a cow, at the foot of Mount Kuei. And you will see on the side of this cow, if you look closely, the Chinese characters that say, 'This is the monk Kuei-shan.' But if you call me Kuei-shan, you will miss the cow. On the other hand, if you call me a cow, you will miss Kuei-shan. What then is my correct name?"

If you find that name, even now you can meet Kuei-shan eyebrow-to-eyebrow.

Te-shan was originally a teaching monk, well-versed in the Diamond Sutra. When he heard about Zen monks in the south of China who weren't studying the sutras but were just sitting facing the wall and claiming to get enlightenment, he decided he would go to the south and teach them the correct way. Te-shan had a rather fiery spirit and a very strong intention.

In the south of China, he met Zen Master Lung-t'an (Ryutan; Yong Dam). One night he stayed up talking to Lung-t'an until Lung-t'an said, "It's late. You should retire." Te-shan started to go to his room, but it was pitch dark outside. He came back in and said to Lung-t'an, "It's dark outside." Lung-t'an lit a rice-paper candle and handed it to him. As Te-shan stood in the doorway, pulling back the curtain to go out, Lung-t'an suddenly—*ptchh*—blew the candle out, and at that moment Te-shan was greatly awakened. The next day he burned all his commentaries on the Diamond Sutra in front of the assembly.

It is some time after this experience that we encounter him in the current case. All fired up with his newfound freedom and enlightenment, he had been traveling around China, calling on various Zen masters, and he heard about Kuei-shan's community.

Before the actual kong-an, an introduction by Zen Master Yuan-wu (Engo) says, "Under the blue sky, in the bright sunlight, you don't have to point out this and that anymore; but the causal conditions of time and season still require you to give the medicine in accordance with the disease. But tell me, is it better to let go, or is it better to hold still?"³

This is a question that Zen students are always struggling with. Should I make a strong effort and direct myself toward one point like a great samurai warrior? Or should I release and open up and just let be? Here Yuan-wu says the medicine has to fit the particular situation in the moment.

The first paragraph of the kong-an is very interesting

When Te-shan arrived to visit Kuei-shan, he carried his bundle with him into the dharma room, where he crossed from east to west and from west to east. He looked around and said, "There's nothing, nothing." Then he went out.

Hsueh-tou, who was the commentator and organizer of these stories, writes a short comment, saying, "Completely exposed."

The first point is Te-shan carrying his bundle into the dharma room. In fact, that is the title of the case. Today we might say he brought an awful lot of baggage with him. In China around 700 or 800 CE, they already understood this psychological attitude.

At that time, monks usually adhered to a certain formality, although occasionally some wild and free spirit might ignore it. The custom was that when you came to a new temple, you would put on your ceremonial robe, enter the main dharma room, spread out your sitting mat, and bow to the abbot or the master of the temple. But here, Te-shan comes

into the dharma room still carrying his pack from the road, his bundle. Then he walks from east to west, from west to east, proclaims, "There is nothing, nothing," and walks out. By holding on to his bundle, it appears that he is clinging to something. Some hindering attitude is preventing him from connecting with his situation.

Of course, we all find ourselves frequently carrying some bundle along with us. Either we are making ourselves too exalted, or we are belittling ourselves too much. We are carrying some coloring attitude toward self and the world we encounter, and it obscures what is clear and present. A well-known Zen phrase is, "Put it all down." But if you're going to put it all down, then you first have to perceive what you are carrying. What is it that I am coloring everything with? What kind of attitude is getting in the way? Is it negative? Is it positive? If you perceive that, then you can put it down. Sometimes you have to put it down many, many times. Ultimately, you even have to put down the putting down.

Te-shan is carrying a big nothing bundle with him. Nothing, nothing—he's got plenty of nothing.

Sometimes the image of carrying a bundle implies the attitude of obligation. Te-shan seems to feel a compelling obligation to walk in and proclaim, "Nothing, nothing" and wake everybody to that fact. Christianity has an injunction, "Take up the cross, and follow me."⁴ That's a statement of practice obligation. One Zen master said, "It's as if our true self wants us to do that, wants us to become clear."

At the Buddhist precepts ceremony, we make the request of ourselves, "May we cast off our obligations and involvements and enter into the uncreated, and by so doing fulfill our greatest obligation." This phraseology comes from a Buddhist monk's or nun's renouncement of worldly affairs in order to realize their (and our) spiritual being. But the notion of the homeless life, or the monk's life, is not limited to monks, because each of us has an obligation to wake up to our true being and our true self. That becomes—if you are a Zen student and practicing the Zen way—your central obligation, to wake up. In so doing, you enter the nonattachment path. When we practice the path of nonattachment, at that moment we are not carrying a bundle. We are not clinging to anything. We are not holding on to any concept or idea.

In Zen there is another familiar image of someone carrying a bundle. This one is quite different from Te-shan's bundle. This character holding a bag, often depicted in Zen brush paintings, goes by the name of Pu-tai (Hotei). He is usually pictured as a chubby guy with a big round belly who is laughing or smiling. He is often surrounded by a group of

children, and he is reaching into his sack to dispense gifts to the children. In China, Pu-tai is considered to be an incarnation of the Buddha of Loving Kindness, Maitreya. So carrying something in a self-centered way is transmuted into carrying something in a selfless, generous, and compassionate way.

Several hundred years ago in Korea there lived a monk who had a very sincere practice spirit. The people in his village looked up to him and admired him. Whenever they needed a ceremony performed, they would call on this monk, knowing that, because of his purity and sincerity, the ceremony would have great merit to it. At first he would be given the small customary donation for his services. But little by little he began to ask for larger and larger donations from the people, until he started to appear not very sincere and not very pure of heart but quite greedy. The villagers began to say disparagingly that he was making his living from the moktak. (The moktak is the wooden instrument monks use to accompany their chanting.) But the monk seemed impervious to the criticism. He just kept asking for bigger and bigger donations and socking away the money.

Then a big flood came and destroyed many homes in the village, washing away the crops. It was a bad time for everyone. One day the monk appeared in the center of the village with a cart and a big chest. He opened up the chest and began to dispense money to everyone according to their need. So sometimes what might appear to be avarice or miserliness is not.

In the commentary to this case, after Te-shan walks into the dharma room and proclaims “There is nothing, nothing” and walks out, the commentator writes, “He has a lot of Ch’an (Zen), but what for?”⁵ That means that his spirit and energy are quite strong, but has his wisdom ripened enough for him to really know what to do with it?

There is another point here: He walks into the dharma room carrying his bundle. Besides the formal dharma room, the place of practice, there is the original dharma room—the space of truth. Dharma means truth, or true way. We all have that space of truth from the beginning. That space is pure and clear and includes relative and absolute. It includes all phenomena and noumena and the perception that each thing is already complete.

In that space, there is essentially no coming into it or going out of it, and also no staying. So there is no coming, no going, and no staying, because terms like *coming*, *going*, and *staying* all are relative terms, and in this fundamental space of truth, there is no one thing relative to another. Each thing is just as

it is. But if you carry a bundle of some kind into that space and parade it back and forth from east to west and west to east, then that space, which is originally wide and open and clear, begins to become very, very narrow. Thus our practice is to perceive when and how we are doing that and just let go of it, put it down!

At that point, Hsueh-tou comments, “Completely exposed.” What is it that is completely exposed? That kind of comment is sometimes called a “phrase that comes down on both sides,” like a double-edged sword; it cuts both ways. On one side, Te-shan reveals the fundamental point: nothing, nothing. But simultaneously he also reveals where he is stuck. Someone might say to him, “If there’s nothing, then how do you even open your mouth to say ‘nothing?’” So “completely exposed” means he shows, at that moment, just where he is and where he is not.

Then the next part of the story says, “When Te-shan got to the monastery gate, he said, ‘I shouldn’t have been so brash.’ So he composed himself properly to meet Kuei-shan,” which means he put on his ceremonial vestments and then came back into the dharma room.

Kuei-shan sat in place.

That’s a very interesting image. It’s the manifestation of not-moving mind. There is a lot of commotion going on: east to west, west to east, nothing, nothing, going out, coming back with a new set of clothes on. But Kuei-shan, being the old cow that he is, sits in place, just watching.

Sometimes in Zen we talk about host and guest. A guest is that which is coming and going. A host is that which is never moving. In the Lin-chi (Rinzai) tradition—one of the main schools of Zen in China shortly after this time—Zen Master Lin-chi would often use the teaching device of host and guest. The host-and-guest meditational attitude means that you hold the position, as Kuei-shan does, of just perceiving what is coming and going, coming and going, coming and going. Thinking appears; thinking disappears. Sensation appears; sensation disappears. Emotion appears; emotion disappears. You just perceive, sitting there quietly, like an old cow lying in the grass chewing its cud. There may be a big commotion going on, but you don’t care. You don’t try to get rid of it; you don’t try to push it away. Kuei-shan doesn’t call out to the attendant, “Carry this lunatic out of here and show him the gate!” So you don’t try to push anything away.

On the other hand, you don’t get caught by it. You just perceive coming and going, coming and going. Fundamentally, host and guest are not two separate things. They are like waves and water. The waves are moving, moving,

moving. The water is always there. But you can't talk about waves as something separate from the water or water as something separate from waves. If there is water, there are waves. If there is mind, there will be thoughts. So don't be bothered by your thinking when you practice.

Te-shan reentered to meet Kuei-shan, and Kuei-shan just sat there. Then Te-shan held up his sitting mat and said, "Master!" Monks used to carry some kind of mat or cloth with them so when they came in front of the teacher they could make a formal prostration. But here Te-shan doesn't make the formal prostration but instead holds up the mat. Then he yells out, "Master!"

Kuei-shan just reaches for his whisk and casually raises it—not a very dramatic response to Te-shan. At that time in China, Zen masters would have a horsehair whisk that was a symbol of their position. The whisk would usually be at the side of the seat. Then Te-shan shouted "KATZ!" to take away everything again, whirled around, and left. The Zen shout (KATZ! Or Ho! Or Haahh!) was used by Zen monks to reveal fundamental empty mind.

Hsueh-tou comments a second time, "Completely exposed." What is completely exposed there? Has Kuei-shan completely exposed Te-shan? Has Te-shan completely exposed Kuei-shan? Has Hsueh-tou, the commentator, completely exposed both of them? And what is being exposed? Host and guest—coming and going, and not moving?

Then the story says that Te-shan turned his back on the dharma room, put on his grass shoes, and left.

The commentary says, "Te-shan won the hat on his head but lost the shoes on his feet."⁶ Now, if you're going to make a long journey, you need both a hat on your head—especially if you're a monk and your head is shaved—but probably more importantly you need the shoes on your feet, which are not as obvious as the hat on your head. It says he won the hat on his head, which means he looked pretty good, but Kuei-shan very quietly took away his shoes. Through his calm demeanor, Kuei-shan revealed that Te-shan was not yet fully mature as a Zen adept.

Kuei-shan still didn't make much of a commotion, but later he asked the head monk, "Where is that newcomer who just came?" The head monk answered, "At that time, when the two of you got into all this, he turned his back on the dharma room, put on his grass shoes, and left."

So Kuei-shan said, summing up the whole business, "Hereafter that lad will go to the summit of a solitary peak, build himself a grass hut, and go on cursing the Buddhas

and slandering the Patriarchs." That means that even though he's way up high somewhere, he has essentially lost his way.

Hsueh-tou adds one more comment: "Adding frost on the snow."⁸ You don't need to add frost on top of snow, it is already there, so the comment means, "Isn't it obvious?"

After the case, there's a poem.

One "completely exposed"
A second "completely exposed"
"Adding frost to snow"—(Te-shan) has had a
dangerous fall.
The General of the Flying Cavalry enters the
enemy camp;
How many could regain their safety?
(Te-shan) hurriedly runs past—
(But Kuei-shan) doesn't let him go.
On the summit of a solitary peak, he sits
among the weeds;
Bah!

The penultimate line is also translated as, "Alas! He is seated among the weeds / On the isolated mountaintop."⁹ In Zen poetry, weeds are usually an image of complications and of being all caught up in something. So even though he has gone to an isolated mountaintop, Te-shan still is not free.

Zen practice is to attain the mountaintop and return to the valley. One side is the absolute point. The other side is, "just now, how can I help you?"

We hope that we will put down our bundles over and over again, untie ourselves from the weeds that we get caught in, and practice the way of openness and compassion.

Notes

1. See Seung Sahn, trans., *The Blue Cliff Record* (Cumberland, RI: Kwan Um School of Zen, 1983), 4.
2. Actually, Kuei-shan was not Kuei-shan's real name. That was his Zen master's name, which was taken from the mountain on which he eventually built his temple. Shan means "mountain" in Chinese, so his name means Mount Kuei.
3. Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary, trans., *The Blue Cliff Record* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 22.
4. Mark 10:21.
5. Cleary and Cleary, 23.
6. Ibid.
7. Cleary and Cleary, 27–28.
8. Seung Sahn, 4.
9. Katsuki Sekida, trans., *Two Zen Classics: The Gateless Gate and the Blue Cliff Record* (Boston: Shambhala, 1977, 2005), 155. 