

Fresh Breeze Every Step

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One day before lunch, Zen Master Yao Shan hit the drum himself. Following the beats of the drum, the novice monk Gao held a bowl in his hand and danced into the dining hall.

Yao Shan put down the drumstick and asked, “Which section is this?”

Novice Gao replied, “The second section.”

Yao Shan asked, “Then, what is the first section?”

Novice Gao took up a scoop of rice and left, coming as wind and going as smoke.

Analysis and Appreciation

Ah! Dancing into the dining hall for a meal. Novice Gao must be the first in Buddhist history to do so! There is an interesting story about Novice Gao. Why didn't he take the monk's precepts, remaining a novice monk instead?

When he first met Yao Shan, the Zen master asked him, “Where are you going?”

Gao said, “Going to Jiang Ling to take the full precepts.”

Yao Shan said, “What's the purpose of taking the precepts?”

Gao replied, “To be free of life and death.”

Yao Shan said, “There is a person who is free of life and death without taking the precepts. Do you know that?”

Gao said, “That being so, I don't need to take the precepts!”

Indeed, after his enlightenment, Novice Gao did not take the monk's precepts!

We can see that Novice Gao had completely returned to origi-

nal substance and was not bound by external forms. As in this kong-an, a meal could have begun with a joyful dance. Why is it necessary to perform the ritual meal chanting until the dishes are cold before we eat?

When Yao Shan asked “Which section is this?” he was actually asking Gao, “At which level is your current expression?”

“The second section” means the expression of the worldly truth. So, Yao Shan's query “Then, what is the first section?” means “What is the expression of the first truth or ultimate truth?”

Take a scoop of rice and leave. This is an ordinary affair. That is the ultimate truth! There is no need to talk about it. Talking about it falls back into the second or worldly truth.

The beginning of Diamond Sutra says, “After taking the meal, the Buddha kept his robe and bowl, washed his feet, and then sat in meditation.” In fact, the Diamond Sutra is already complete at this point. Whatever follows is just like the Chinese idiom, “painting feet on a snake.” Out of compassion, the Buddha had to keep talking.

The theme of today's celebration is “Fresh Breeze Every Step.”

What is “Fresh Breeze Every Step?”

KATZ!

Watch your step.



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That's Not a Bad Business Deal, Yah?

Zen Master Dae Kwan

In 2003, Zen Master Dae Kwan visited Zen Master Seung Sahn in Seoul. One time he said out loud, to no one in particular, “Much pain! Much pain! My body have much pain!”

Hearing this, Zen Master Dae Kwan said to him, “Sir, please give your pain to us. We want to take your pain.”

But Zen Master Seung Sahn only waved his hand in refusal. “No, no, no, no, no! It's enough only I experience this. Never give to you—only I keep!”

But Zen Master Dae Kwan persisted, “No, sir. We want to take your pain away!”

“You cannot,” Zen Master Seung Sahn replied. “My pain is very expensive!” “My pain is so expensive, you cannot buy it!”

Zen Master Dae Kwan said, “Then maybe I will sell Su Bong Zen Monastery, get lots of money, and give to you. Then you give us your pain!” Zen Master Seung Sahn only kept silent. “If we give you all of this money, then what will you do with it?” Zen Master Dae Kwan finally asked him.

“I take your money, rent another Zen center, and save all beings from suffering!” At these words, everybody burst out laughing. Zen Master Seung Sahn also laughed and said, “That's not a bad business deal, yah?”

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