

# MUMONKAN

**Main Case, Mumon's Commentary, Verse**

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*CASE 1: Jōshū's Dog*

*Case:*

The monk asked Jōshū in all earnestness, "Does a dog have Buddha nature or not?" Jōshū said, "*Mu!*"

*Mumon's Commentary:*

For the practice of Zen, you must pass the barrier set up by the ancient masters of Zen. To attain to marvelous enlightenment, you must completely extinguish all thoughts of the ordinary mind. If you have not passed the barrier and have not extinguished all thoughts, you are a phantom haunting the weeds and trees. Now just tell me, what is the barrier by the patriarchs? Merely this *Mu* – the one barrier of our sect. So it has come to be called "the Gateless barrier of the Zen Sect." Those who have passed the barrier are able not only to see Jōshū face to face but also to walk hand in hand with the whole descending line of patriarchs and be eyebrow to eyebrow with them. You will see with the same eye that they see with, hear with the same ear that they hear with. Wouldn't it be a wonderful joy! Isn't there anyone who wants to pass this barrier? Then concentrate your whole self into this *Mu*, making your whole body with its 360 bones and joints and 84,000 pores into a solid lump of doubt. Day and night, without ceasing, keep digging into it, but don't take it as "nothingness" or as "being" or "non-being". It must be like a red-hot iron ball which you have gulped down and which you try to vomit but cannot. You must extinguish all delusive thoughts and beliefs which you have cherished up to the present. After a certain period of such efforts, *Mu* will come to fruition, and inside and out will become one naturally. You will then be like a dumb man who has had a dream. You will know yourself and for yourself only. Then all of a sudden, *Mu* will break open. It will astonish the heavens and shake the earth. It will be just as if you had snatched the great sword of General Kan: If you meet a Buddha, you will kill him. If you meet a patriarch, you will kill him. Though you may stand on the brink of life and death, you will enjoy the great freedom. In the six realms and the four modes of birth, you will live in the samadhi of innocent play. Now, how should you concentrate on *Mu*? Exhaust every ounce of energy you have in doing it. And if you do not give up on the way, you will be enlightened the way a candle in front of the altar is lighted by one touch of fire.

*Verse:*

Dog – Buddha nature!

The perfect manifestation, the absolute command.

A little "has" or "has not,"

And body is lost! Life is lost!

## CASE 2: Hyakujô and the Fox

### Case:

Whenever master Hyakujô delivered a sermon, an old man was always there listening with the monks. When they left, he left too. One day, however, he remained behind. The master asked him, "What man are you, standing in front of me?" The man replied, "Indeed, I am not a man. In the past, in the time of Kashyapa Buddha<sup>1</sup>, I lived on this mountain (as a Zen priest). On one occasion a monk asked me, 'Does a perfectly enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect or not?' I answered, 'He does not.' Because of this answer, I fell into the state of a fox for 500 lives. Now, I beg you, Master, please say a turning word<sup>2</sup> on my behalf and release me from the body of a fox." Then he asked, "Does a perfectly enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect or not?" The master answered, "The law of cause and effect cannot be obscured." Upon hearing this, the old man immediately became deeply enlightened. Making his bow, he said, "I have now been released from the old fox and will be behind the mountain. I dare to make a request of the Master. Please perform my funeral as you would for a deceased priest." The master had Inô<sup>3</sup> strike the anvil<sup>4</sup> with a gavel and announce to the monks that after the meal there would be a funeral service for a deceased priest. The monks wondered, saying, "All are healthy. No one is sick in the infirmary. What's this all about?" After the meal, the master led the monks to the foot of a rock behind the mountain and with his staff poked out the dead body of a fox. He then performed the ceremony of cremation.

That evening the master ascended the rostrum in the hall and told the monks the story. Ôbaku thereupon asked, "The man of old missed the turning word and fell to the state of a fox for 500 lives. Suppose every time he answered he made no mistakes, what would happen then?" The master said, "Just come nearer and I'll tell you." Ôbaku then went up to the master and slapped him. The master clapped his hands and, laughing aloud, said, "I thought the barbarian's beard was red, but here is a barbarian with a red beard!"

### Mumon's Commentary:

Not falling under the law of cause and effect - for what reason had he fallen into the state of a fox? The law of cause and effect cannot be obscured - for what reason has he been released from a fox's body? If in regard to this you have the one eye, then you will understand that

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<sup>1</sup> Kashyapa Buddha is the sixth of the Seven Buddhas of Antiquity, Shakyamuni being the seventh. Here we may understand that "the time of Kashyapa Buddha" means long, long ago.

<sup>2</sup> A turning word (tengo) is a word or phrase which has the power to turn delusions into enlightenment.

<sup>3</sup> Inô (Chinese: awei-na; Sanskrit: karmandana) is an official position and title in a Zen monastery, being the monk in charge of rules, regulations, and the registry of monks.

<sup>4</sup> In order to make an announcement in the temple, the monks often used a kind of wooden anvil (byakutsui), which was about 120 cm tall, cut octagonally, and made slimmer toward the top surface. A gavel, which was also cut in octagonal shape, was used to strike the center of the surface of the anvil hard after first moving it several times in a spiral on the anvil's surface.

the former Hyakujô enjoyed 500 lives of grace as a fox.

Verse:

Not falling, not obscuring,

Two faces, one die<sup>5</sup>.

Not obscuring, not falling,

A thousands mistakes, ten thousand mistakes.

**CASE 3: Gutei's One Finger**

Case:

Whatever he was asked about Zen, Master Gutei simply stuck up his finger.

He had a boy attendant whom a visitor asked, "What kind of teaching does your master give?"

The boy held up one finger too. Hearing of this, Gutei cut off the boy's finger with a knife.

As the boy ran away, screaming with pain, Gutei called to him. When the boy turned his head, Gutei stuck up one finger. The boy was suddenly enlightened.

When Gutei was about to die, he said to the assembled monks, "I received this one-finger Zen from Tenryû<sup>6</sup>. I've used it all my life but have not exhausted it." Having said this, he entered nirvana.

Mumon's Commentary:

The enlightenment of Gutei and the boy have nothing to do with the tip of a finger. If you realize this, Tenryû, Gutei, the boy, and you yourself are all run through with one skewer.

Verse:

Old Tenryû made a fool of Gutei,

Who cut the boy with a sharp blade.

The mountain deity Korei raised his hand, and lo, without effort,

Great Mount Ka with its many ridges was split in two!

**CASE 4: The Barbarian Has No Beard**

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<sup>5</sup> A block of wood, plastic etc. with a different number of spots on each side, used in games (pl.: dice).

<sup>6</sup> Nothing is known about Master Tenryû except for the following *mondo* (questions-and-answer exchange) held between a monk and him: A monk asked, "How can I get out of the three worlds?" [In Buddhist philosophy, the three delusive worlds are those of desire, form, and no-form] Master Tenryû said, "Where are you right now?" -- Tenryû is supposed to have had Master Daibai Hôjô as his teacher.

Case:

Wakuan said, "Why has the western barbarian no beard?"

Mumon's Commentary:

If you practice Zen, you must actually practice it. If you become enlightened, it must be the real experience of enlightenment. You see this barbarian once face to face; then for the first time, you will be able to acknowledge him. But if you say that you see him face to face, in that instant there is division into two.

Verse:

In front of a fool  
Do not talk about dreams;  
The barbarian has no beard:  
It's adding to clarity.

CASE 5: Kyôgen's Man Up a Tree

Case:

Master Kyôgen said, "It's like a man up the tree, hanging from a branch by his moth; his hands cannot grasp a branch, his feet won't reach a bough. Suppose there is another man under the tree who asks him, 'What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the west?' If he does not respond, he goes against the wish of the questioner. If he answers, he will lose his life. At such a time, how should he respond?"

Mumon's Commentary:

Even if your eloquence flows like a river, it is of no use. Even if you can expound the whole body of the sutras, it is of no avail. If you can respond to it fittingly, you will give life to those who have been dead, and put to death those who have been alive. If, however, you are unable to do this, wait for Maitreya to come and ask him.

Verse:

Kyôgen is really absurd,  
His perversity knows no bounds;  
He stops up the monk's mouths,  
Making his whole body into the glaring eyes of a demon.

**CASE 6: Buddha Holds Up a Flower**

**Case:**

Once in ancient times, when the World-Honored One was at Mount Grdhrakûta<sup>7</sup>, he held up a flower, twirled it, and showed it to the assemblage. At this, they all remained silent. Only the venerable Kashyapa broke into a smile. The World-Honored One said: "I have the eye treasury of the true Dharma, the marvelous mind of nirvana, the true form of no-form, the subtle gate of the Dharma. It does not depend on letters, being specially transmitted outside all teachings. Now I entrust Mahakashyapa with this."

**Mumon's Commentary:**

The golden-faced Gautama insolently suppressed noble people and made them lowly. He sells dog's flesh under the label of sheep's head. I thought there should be something of particular merit in it. If at that time, however, all those attending had smiled, how would the eye treasury of the true Dharma have been transmitted? Or if Kashyapa had not smiled, how would he have been entrusted with it? If you say that the eye treasury of the true Dharma can be transmitted, then that is as if the golden-faced old man is swindling country people at the town gate. If you say it cannot be transmitted, then why did Buddha say he entrusted only Kashyapa with it?

**Verse:**

In handling a flower,  
The tail of the snake manifested itself.  
Kashyapa breaks into a smile,  
Nobody on earth or in heaven knows what to do.

**CASE 7: Jôshû's "Wash Your Bowls"**

**Case:**

A monk asked Jôshû in all earnestness, "I have just entered this monastery. I beg you, Master, please give me instructions." Jôshû asked, "Have you eaten your rice gruel yet?" The monk answered, "Yes, I have." Jôshû said, "Then wash your bowls." The monk attained some realization.

**Mumon's Commentary:**

Jôshû, opening his mouth, showed his gall bladder and revealed his heart and liver. If the monk, hearing it, did not really grasp the fact, he would mistake a bell for a pot.

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<sup>7</sup> Mt. Grdhrakûta, or Vulture Peak, where Shakyamuni Buddha preached, is located near the capital of Magada in ancient India.

Verse:

Just because it is so clear,  
It takes us longer to realize it.  
If you quickly acknowledge that the candlelight is fire,  
You will find that the rice has been cooked.

**CASE 8: Keichû Makes Carts**

Case:

Master Gettan asked a monk, "Keichû made a hundred carts. If he took off both wheels and removed the axle, what would he make clear about the cart?"

Mumon's Commentary:

If you can realize this at once, your eye will be a shooting star and your spiritual activity like caching lightning.

Verse:

Where the active wheel revolves,  
Even a master fails,  
It moves in four directions: above and below,  
South and north, east and west.

**CASE 9: Daitsû Chishô**

Case:

Once a monk earnestly asked Priest Jô of Kôyô, "Daitsû Chishô Buddha sat in the meditation hall for ten kalpas, but the Dharma of the Buddha did not manifest itself and he could not attain Buddhahood. Why was this?" Jô replied, "Your question is reasonable indeed." The monk said, "He sat in zazen in the meditation hall. Why did he not attain Buddhahood?" Jô replied, "Because he is a non-attained Buddha."

Mumon's Commentary:

I approve the old barbarian's realization, but I don't approve the old barbarian's understanding. When an ordinary person has realized it, he is a saint. If a saint understands it, he is nothing but an ordinary person.

Verse:

Far better than realizing the body is to realize the mind and be at peace.  
If the mind is realized, there is no anxiety about the body;  
If both body and mind are completely realized,  
A holy hermit does not wish to be appointed lord.

CASE 10: Seizei the Poor

Case:

A monk, Seizei, eagerly asked Master Sôzan, "I am solitary and poor. I beg you Master, please help me to become prosperous." San said, "Venerable<sup>8</sup> Zei!" "Yes Master!" replied Zei. San said, "You have already drunk three cups of fine Hakka wine and still you say that you have not yet moistened your lips."

Mumon's Commentary:

Seizei is obsequious in tone but what is real intention? Sôzan has the penetrating eye and thoroughly discerns the monk's state of mind. Be that as it may, just tell me, where and how has Venerable Zei drunk the wine?

Verse:

Poor like Hantan,  
Of a spirit like Kôu,  
Though they cannot sustain themselves  
They dare to compete with each other for wealth.

CASE 11: Jôshû Examines the Hermits

Case:

Jôshû went to a hermit's hut and asked, "Anybody in? Anybody in?" The hermit thrust up his fist. Jôshû said, "The water is too shallow for a ship to anchor." Thereupon he left. Again he went to a hermit's hut and asked, "Anybody in? Anybody in?" The hermit, too, thrust up his fist. Jôshû said, "Freely you give, freely you take away. Freely you kill, freely you give life." He made a profound bow.

Mumon's Commentary:

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<sup>8</sup> "Venerable" is used here to translate *shari* (ajari in full form, Acarya in Sanskrit), an honorific title for a monk who leads disciples, correcting their manners and deeds.

Each hermit thrust up his fist the same way. Why is one accepted and the other rejected? Tell me, what is the cause of the confusion? If on this point you say a turning word, then you can see that Jôshû's tongue has no bone. Now he raises up, now he thrusts up in perfect freedom. But though this is so, it is also true that Jôshû himself has been seen through by the two hermit's. Furthermore, if you can say that there is a distinction of superiority and inferiority between the two hermits, you have not yet the eye of realization. Neither have you the eye of realization if you say there is no distinction of superiority and inferiority between them.

Verse:

His eye is a shooting star,  
His activity like lightning;  
A sword that kills man,  
A sword that gives man life.

**CASE 12: Zuigan Calls Himself "Master"**

Case:

Every day Master Zuigan used to call to himself, "Master!" and would answer, "Yes!" Again, he would call, "Thoroughly awake! Thoroughly awake!" and he would answer, "Yes! Yes!" "Don't be deceived by others, any day or any time." "No! No!"

Mumon's Commentary:

Old Zuigan himself buys and sells. He has many puppet gods and devils with he plays. But why? Look! One is calling. One is answering. One keeps awake. One is not deceived by others. But if you get stuck there, that's not it. If you were to imitate Zuigan, it would be the understanding of a fox.

Verse:

The reason those who learn the Way don't realize the truth  
Is simply that they perceive the discriminating consciousness they've had all along.  
It is the origin of endless life and death;  
Fools take it for the essential self.

**CASE 13: Tokusan Carries His Bowl**

Case:

One day Tokusan came down to the hall carrying his bowls. Seppô asked him, "Old Master, the bell has not yet rung nor the drum sounded. Where are you going with your bowls?" Tokusan immediately went back to his room. Seppô told this to Gantô. Gantô said, "Great Tokusan though he is, he has not yet realized the last word." Hearing of this, Tokusan sent his attendant to summon Gantô and then asked him, "Don't you approve of this old monk?" Gantô secretly whispered his intention. Tokusan remained silent. Sure enough, the next day when Tokusan ascended the rostrum, his talk was quite different from usual. Gantô went to the front of the Zen hall and rubbing his hands together, laughed loudly and said, "Wonderful! How happy I am that our Old Man has realized the last word. From now on he'll be subject to no one on earth."

*Mumon's Commentary:*

As for the last word, neither Gantô nor Tokusan have ever heard it, even in a dream. When I examine this point, I find they are just puppets on a shelf.

*Verse:*

If you grasp the first word,  
You will realize the last word.  
The last word and the first word,  
These are not one word.

***CASE 14: Nansen Kills the Cat***

*Case:*

Once the monk of the eastern and western Zen halls in Master Nansen's temple were quarrelling about a cat. Nansen held up the cat and said, "You monks! If one of you can say a word, I will spare the cat. If you can't say anything, I will put it to the sword." No one could answer, so Nansen finally slew it.

In the evening when Jôshû returned, Nansen told him what had happened. Jôshû thereupon took off his sandals, put them on his head, and walked off. Nansen said, "If you had been there, I could have spared the cat."

*Mumon's Commentary:*

What is the meaning of Jôshû's putting his sandals on his head? If you can give a turning word concerning this matter, you will be able to see that Nansen's command was not meaningless. But if you can't look out! Danger!

*Verse:*

Had Jôshû been there,  
He would have given the command instead;  
Had he snatched away the sword,  
Even Nansen would have begged for his life.

**CASE 15: Tôzan's Sixty Blows**

Case:

When Tôzan came to Unmon for instruction, Unmon asked, "Where have you come from?" Tôzan said, "From Sado." Unmon said, "Where were you during the summer retreat?" Tôzan said, "At Hôzu Monastery, south of the lake." Unmon said, "When did you leave there?" Tôzan said, "On the twenty-fifth of August." Unmon said, "I spare you sixty blows."

The next day Tôzan came up to Unmon and asked, "Yesterday you spared me sixty blows though I deserved them. I beg you, sir, where was I at fault?" Unmon said, "Oh, you rice bag! Have you been wandering about like that, now west of the river, now south of the lake?" At this, Tôzan had great realization.

Mumon's Commentary:

At that time, if Unmon had given Tôzan the essential food of Zen and awakened him to an active Zen spirit, his family gate would not have become so desolate. Tôzan struggled with himself in agony all through the night and at daybreak came to Unmon again. Unmon gave him a further push to break through. Although Tôzan attained realization immediately, he still could not be called bright. Now I ask you, does Tôzan deserve sixty blows with the stick or not? If you say he does, then all the trees, grasses, thickets, and groves should be beaten. If you say he does not, then Unmon is telling a lie. If you grasp this clearly, you are breathing through one mouth with Tôzan.

Verse:

The lion has a puzzling way of teaching its cubs:  
The cubs crouch, leap and spring back swiftly;  
Unintentionally, he gave a checkmate again,  
The first arrow was light, but the second went deep.

**CASE 16: The sound of the Bell and the Seven-Panel Robe**

Case:

Unmon said, "The world is vast and wide like this. Why do we put on our seven-panel robe at the sound of the bell?"

*Mumon's Commentary:*

Generally speaking, in practicing and studying Zen, it is most detestable to follow sounds and pursue colors. Even though you may become enlightened through hearing sounds and come to realize mind by seeing colors, that is the ordinary way of things. People do not know that for real Zen monks, when they are riding on sounds and becoming one with colors, everything is clear, moment by moment, everything is full of wonder, action after action. When you hear a sound, however, just tell me, does the sound come to the ear or the ear go to the sound? Even though you have extinguished both sound and silence, what will you realize here? If you hear with the ear, you cannot realize it. When you hear with the eye, for the first time it will become intimate.

*Verse:*

With realization, all things are of one family  
Without realization, everything is separate and different;  
Without realization, all things are of one family  
With realization, everything is separate and different.

*CASE 17: The National Teacher's Three Calls*

*Case:*

The national teacher called his attendant three times, and three times his attendant responded. The national teacher said, "I thought I was standing alone with my back to you, but now I find that you are standing alone with your back to me."

*Mumon's Commentary:*

The national teacher called three times and his tongue dropped to the ground. The attendant responded three times, emitting the answer with light. The national teacher was old and lonely. He held the cow's head and forced it to eat grass. The attendant would have none of it; delicious food has little attraction for a man who has had enough to eat. Just tell me, where are they standing alone with their backs to each other? When the country is prosperous, persons of talent are esteemed; children of rich families are proud to eat plain food.

*Verse:*

We must carry an iron yoke with no hole,

It is a slight matter, the curse is passed on to our descendants;  
If you want to support the gate and sustain the house,  
You must climb a mountain of swords with bare feet.

**CASE 18: Tôzan's Masagin**

**Case:**

A monk asked Master Tôzan in all earnestness, "What is Buddha?" Tôzan said, "*Masagin!*" (Three pounds of flax!)"

**Mumon's Commentary:**

Old Tôzan realized a bit of clam Zen. Slightly opening the two halves of the shell, he exposed his liver and intestines. This may be so, but tell me, where do you see Tôzan?

**Verse:**

*Masagin* juts forth!

Words are intimate and the mind is even more intimate.

He who speaks about right and wrong

Is a man of right and wrong.

**CASE 19: Ordinary Mind Is the Way**

**Case:**

Jôshû earnestly asked Nansen, "What is the Way?" Nansen answered, "The ordinary mind is the Way." Jôshû asked, "Should I direct myself toward it or not?" Nansen said, "If you try to turn toward it, you go against it." If I do not try to turn toward it, how can I know that it is the Way?" Nansen answered, "The Way does not belong to knowing or not-knowing. Knowing is delusion; not-knowing is a blank consciousness. When you have really reached the true Way beyond all doubt, you will find it as vast and boundless as the great empty firmament. How can it be talked about on a level of right and wrong?" At these words, Jôshû was suddenly enlightened.

**Mumon's Commentary:**

Nansen was asked a question by Jôshû, and Nansen's base was shattered and melted away. He could not justify himself. Even though Jôshû has come to realization, he will have to delve into it for another thirty years before he can realize it fully.

Verse:

The spring flowers, the moon in autumn,  
The cool breezes of summer, the winter's snow;  
If idle concerns do not cloud the mind,  
This is man's happiest reason.

**CASE 20: A Man of Great Strength**

Case:

Master Shôgen said, "Why is it that a man of great strength does not lift up his leg?" He also said, "It is not with the tongue that we speak."

Mumon's Commentary:

It should be said that Shôgen poured out all that he had in his intestines and belly. But there is nobody who can recognize this. However, even someone who realized this immediately would be given a bitter blow by me. Why? Look! If you want to know whether it is pure gold or not, you must look at it in the midst of fire.

Verse:

Raising a leg, I upturn the Scented Ocean;  
Lowering my head, I look down on the dhyana heavens.  
There is no place to put this whole body,  
Please finish this poem in your own words.

**CASE 21: Unmon's Kanshiketsu**

Case:

A monk asked Unmon in all earnestness, "What is Buddha?" Unmon said, "*Kanshiketsu!* (a dried shit-stick)"

Mumon's Commentary:

It should be said of Unmon that he was too poor to prepare even the plainest food and too busy to write a draft. Suddenly he took up the shit-stick to support the gate (of Buddhism). You can see how the Dharma has decayed.

Verse:

Lightning flashing,

Sparks shooting from a flint;  
A moment's blinking-  
It's already missed.

**CASE 22: Kashyapa's Flagpole**

Case<sup>9</sup>:

Ananda asked Kashyapa in all earnestness, "The world-Honored One transmitted the brocade robe to you. What else did he transmit to you?" Kashyapa called, "Ananda!" Ananda replied, "Yes, Master." Kashyapa said, "Knock down the flagpole at the gate."

Mumon's Commentary:

If you can give a turning word befitting this, you will see that the meeting at Mount Grdhrahakûta is definitely still in session. If not, it is because Vipashyin Buddha has keeping something in mind from the remotest times, and even now he still cannot attain the mystery.

Verse:

The answer is more familiar than the question;  
How many discuss this with glaring eyes!  
Elder brother calls, younger brother answers - the family disgrace!  
Here is the spring that belongs to neither yin nor yang.

**CASE 23: Think Neither Good Nor Evil**

Case:

The sixth patriarch was once pursued by the monk Myô as far as Mount Daiyu. The patriarch, seeing Myô coming, laid the robe and bowl on a rock and said, "This robe represents the faith. How can it be competed for by force? I will allow you to take it away." Myô tried to lift it up, but it was as immovable as a mountain. Terrified and trembling with awe, he said, "I came for the Dharma, not the robe. I beg you, lay brother, please reveal it to me." The patriarch said, "[At the very moment you were chasing after me] without thinking good or evil, what was the primal face of Monk Myô?" In that instant, Myô suddenly attained deep realization, and his whole body was covered with sweat. In tears, he bowed and said, "Besides the secret words and secret meaning you have just revealed to me, is there anything else deeper yet?" The patriarch said, "What I have preached to you is no secret at

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<sup>9</sup> This is the story of Dharma transmission from Kashyapa, the first Patriarch, to Ananda, the second Patriarch.

all. If you reflect on your own true face, the secret will be found within yourself." Myô said, "Though I have been at Ôbai with the other monks, I have never realized what my true self is. Now, thanks to your instruction, I know it is like a man who drinks water and knows for himself whether it is cold or warm. Now you, lay brother, are my master." The patriarch said, "If that is the way you feel, let us both have Ôbai for our master. Be mindful and hold fast to what you have realized."

*Mumon's Commentary:*

It should be said of the sixth patriarch that his action sprang from urgent circumstances. His kindness is like that of a grandmother who peels a fresh litchi, removes the seed, and puts it into your mouth so that all you have to do is swallow it.

Verse:

It can't be described! It can't be pictured!  
It can't be sufficiently praised! Stop trying to grasp it with your head!  
There is nowhere to hide the primal face;  
Even when the world is destroyed, it is indestructible.

**CASE 24: Learning Speech and Silence Behind**

Case:

A monk asked Fuketsu in all earnestness, "Both speech and silence are concerned with ri and mi. How can we transcend them?" Fuketsu said, "I am constantly think of Kônan in march, where partridges are chirping among hundreds of fragrant blossoms."

*Mumon's Commentary:*

Fuketsu's activity of mind is like lightening. He gains the road and immediately walks along. But why does he rest upon the tip of the ancient one's tongue and not cut off? If you realize this deeply, a way will be found naturally. Just leave all words behind and say one phrase.

Verse:

Fuketsu does not speak in his usual style;  
Before he says anything, it is already manifested.  
If you go chattering glibly,  
You should be ashamed of yourself.

**CASE 25: The Sermon of the Third Seat**

**Case:**

Master Kyôzan went to Maitreya's abode in a dream and was led to the third seat. A venerable monk struck the anvil with a gavel and said, "Today the third seat is due to speak." Kyôzan stood up, struck the stand with the gavel, and said, "The Dharma of Mahayana is beyond the four propositions and transcends the hundred negations. Listen! Listen!"

**Mumon's Commentary:**

Just say, did he preach or did he not? If you open your mouth, you miss. If you shut your mouth, you miss too. Even if you neither open nor shut your mouth, it is a hundred and eight thousand miles away.

**Verse:**

The broad daylight, the blue sky -  
He speaks of a dream in a dream;  
Suspicious! Suspicious!  
He is trying to deceive the whole assembly.

**CASE 26: Two Monks Roll Up the Blinds**

**Case:**

A monk once went to Daihōgen of Seiryō before the midday meal to ask for instruction. Hōgen pointed to the bamboo blinds with his hand. At that moment, two monks who were there went over to the blinds and rolled them up in the same manner. Hōgen said, "One has gained, one has lost."

**Mumon's Commentary:**

Just tell me, which one has gained and which one has lost? If you have one eye opened concerning this point, you will know where National Teacher Seiryō failed. Nevertheless, you should not inquire into this problem in connection with gain or loss.

**Verse:**

The blind being rolled up, bright clarity penetrates the great empty space.  
Yet the great empty space still does not match the principle of our sect;  
It is far better to throw away emptiness and everything completely,  
And with a tight fit, never to let the wind pass through.

**CASE 27: Not Mind, Not Buddha**

**Case:**

A monk asked Nansen in all earnestness, "Is there any Dharma that has not been preached to the people?" Nansen said, "There is." The monk said, "What is the Dharma which has never been preached to the people?" Nansen said, "This is not mind; This is not Buddha; this is not a thing."

**Mumon's Commentary:**

Nansen was merely asked a question, and he exhausted all his possessions at once and went reduced to nothing.

**Verse:**

Speaking too much degrades virtue,  
No words are truly effective;  
Even though the great ocean should change,  
It can never be communicated to you.

**CASE 28: Ryūtan's Name Echoed Long**

**Case:**

One day Tokusan kept asking Ryūtan for instruction till nightfall. Ryūtan finally said, "The night is late. Why don't you go to bed." Tokusan thanked him, made his bows, raised the door curtain and left. Seeing how dark the night was, he turned back and said, "It's pitch black outside." Ryūtan lit a lantern and handed it to Tokusan. Just as Tokusan reached for it, Ryūtan blew it out. At that Tokusan came to sudden realization and made a deep bow. Ryūtan asked, "What have you realized?" Tokusan replied, "From now on, I will not doubt the words of the old master who is renowned everywhere under the sun."

The following day Ryūtan ascended the rostrum and declared, "There is a man among you whose fangs are like trees of swords and whose mouth is like a bowl of blood. Strike him and he won't turn his head. Someday he will settle on the top of an isolated peak and establish my Way there."

Tokusan brought his sutra commentaries and notes to the front of the hall, held up a torch and said, "Even if you have exhausted abstruse doctrine, it is like placing a hair in vast space. Even if you have learned the vital points of all the truths in the world, it is like a drop of water thrown into a big ravine." He then burned all his commentaries and notes. After making his bows, he left.

*Mumon's Commentary:*

Before Tokusan had crossed the border, his mind was full of resentment and his mouth speechless with anger. He wanted to go the way south, intending to refute the doctrine of the special transmission outside the sutras.

When he got to the road to the province of Rei, he asked an old woman if he could buy a tenjin from her. The old woman said, "Your Reverence, what are all those books you are carrying in the cart?" Tokusan said, "Those are commentaries on the Diamond Sutra." The old woman, "In that sutra, it says the past mind can't be caught; the present mind can't be caught; the future mind can't be caught. Your Reverence, with which mind are you going to take the tenjin?" This one question tightly shuts Tokusan's mouth, but hearing the old woman's words, he still did not completely die away. He asked her, "Is there a Zen master near here?" She replied, "Master Ryûtan lives about five *ri* away."

After Tokusan arrived at Ryûtan's, he was entirely defeated. It must be said that his former and latter words are not consistent. It seems that Ryûtan, forgetting his own unsightliness, took too much pity on Tokusan. Seeing a live charcoal in Tokusan, he immediately threw muddy water over his head to extinguish it. Looking at the whole affair coolly, I think it is just a farce.

*Verse:*

Seeing the face is better than hearing the name;  
Hearing the name is better than seeing the face.  
Even though he saved his nose,  
Alas, he lost his eyes!

*CASE 29: Not the Wind, Not the Flag*

*Case:*

The wind was flapping a temple flag, and two were having an argument about it. One said, "The flag is moving." The other said, "The wind is moving." They argued back and forth but could not reach the truth. The sixth patriarch said, "It is not the wind that moves. It is not the flag that moves. It is your mind that moves." The two monks were stuck with awe.

*Mumon's Commentary:*

It is not the wind that moves; it is not the flag that moves; it is not the mind that moves. Where do you see the essence of the patriarch? If you have a close grasp of the matter, you will see how the two monks, intending to buy iron, got gold, and that the patriarch impatiently said a failure on the spot.

Verse:

The wind moves, the flag moves, the mind moves;  
All have missed it.  
They only know how to open their mouths,  
And do not know that their words have failed.

**CASE 30: Mind is Buddha**

Case:

Daibai asked Baso in all earnestness, "What is the Buddha?" Baso answered, "The very mind is Buddha."

Mumon's Commentary:

If you grasp it on the spot, you wear Buddha's clothes, eat Buddha's food, speak Buddha's words, do Buddha's deeds; you are Buddha himself. Though this may be so, Daibai has, alas, misled not a few people into mistaking the mark on the balance for the weight itself. How can he realize that even the mere mention of the word "Buddha" should make a man someone say, "The very mind is Buddha," he will cover his ears and run away.

Verse:

The blue sky, the bright day.  
It is most detestable to hunt around;  
If, furthermore, you ask, "What is Buddha?"  
It is like shouting your innocence while holding the loot.

**CASE 31: Jōshū Sees Through an Old Woman**

Case:

A monk once asked an old woman, "What is the way to Taizan?" The old woman said, "Go straight on." After the monk had gone a few steps, she said, "This good, honest priest goes off that way, too."

Later a monk told Jōshū about this. Jōshū said, "Wait a bit. I will go and see through the old woman for you." The next day he went and asked the same question, and the old woman also made the same reply. On returning, Jōshū said to his disciples, "I have seen through the old woman of Taizan for you."

*Mumon's Commentary:*

The old woman just sits in her tent and knows how to plan the strategy, but she still doesn't know how to capture the bandit. Old Jôshû was clever enough to steal into the camp and menace the fortress, but he hasn't the air of a magnanimous man. Pondering the matter, we must say they both had their faults. Tell me now, what insight did Jôshû get into the old woman?

*Verse:*

The question is the same,  
The answer is the same, too.  
Sand in the rice,  
Thorns in the mud.

*CASE 32: A Non-Buddhist Questions Buddha*

*Case:*

A non-Buddhist in all earnestness asked the World-Honored One, "I do not ask about words, I do not ask about no-words." The World-Honored One just sat still. The non-Buddhist praised him, saying, "The world-Honored One in his benevolence and great mercy has opened the clouds of my delusion and enable me to enter the Way." Then, bowing, he took his leave. Ananda asked Buddha, "What did the non-Buddhist realize that made him praise you so much?" The World-Honored One replied, "He is just a fine horse that runs even at the shadow of a whip."

*Mumon's Commentary:*

Ananda is Buddha's disciple, but his realization is less than the non-Buddhist's. Now tell me, how far is the distance between the non-Buddhist and Buddha's disciple?

*Verse:*

Walking on the edge of a sword,  
Running over a ridge of jagged ice;  
Not using steps or ladders,  
Jumping from the cliff with hands free.

*CASE 33: No Mind, No Buddha*

*Case:*

A monk asked Baso in all earnestness, "What is Buddha?" Baso replied, "No mind, no Buddha."

*Mumon's Commentary:*

If you can see into what was said here, your study is at an end.

*Verse:*

If you meet a swordsman, you may present a sword;  
You should not offer a poem unless you meet a poet.  
When you speak to others, say only three-quarters of it;  
You should never give the remaining part.

*CASE 34: Knowing Is Not the Way*

*Case:*

Nansen said, "Mind is not Buddha; knowing is not the Way."

*Mumon's Commentary:*

It should be said of Nansen that he has grown old and knows no shame. Just opening his stinking mouth he exposed the disgrace of his own household. There are very few, however, who are grateful for his kindness.

*Verse:*

When the sky clears, the sun appears;  
When the rain falls, the earth is wet.  
With all his heart, he has preached everything,  
But I fear nobody can believe it.

*CASE 35: Seijo's Soul Is Separated*

*Case:*

Goso asked a monk, "Seijo and her soul are separated; which one is the true Seijo?"

*Mumon's Commentary:*

If you realize the true one in this, you will understand that getting out of one shell and entering another is just like a traveler staying at an inn; if you have not realized it, don't rush about wildly. When earth, water, fire, and wind are suddenly about to decompose, you will

be like a crab which has fallen into boiling water and its seven arms and eight legs. At that time, don't say I didn't warn you.

Verse:

The clouds and the moon are the same;  
Valleys and mountains are different from each other.  
All are blessed, ten thousand times blessed!  
Is this one? Is this two?

**CASE 36: Meeting a Man Who Has Accomplished the Way**

Case:

Goso said, "If you meet a man on the path who has accomplished the Way, do not greet him with words or silence. Tell me, how will you greet him?"

Mumon's Commentary:

If you can answer this question fittingly, you are certainly to be congratulated. But if you cannot, you should look for it attentively, wherever you are.

Verse:

Meeting on the path a man who has accomplished the Way,  
Do not greet him with words or silence.  
I will punch you in the face;  
If you want to realize, realize on the spot.

**CASE 37: The Oak Tree in the Garden**

Case:

A monk asked Jōshū in all earnestness, "What is the meaning of the patriarch's coming from the West?" Jōshū said, "The oak tree in the garden."

Mumon's Commentary:

If you see through Jōshū's response clearly, there is no Shakyamuni in the past, no Maitreya in the future.

Verse:

Words do not express the fact,

Speech does not match the student;  
Attached to words, one loses the reality,  
Stagnating in phrases, one is deluded.

**CASE 38: A Cow Passes Through a Window**

**Case:**

Goso said, "For example, it's just like a great cow passing through a latticed window. Her head, horns, and four legs have passed through. Why is it that her tail can't pass through?"

**Mumon's Commentary:**

If in regard to this you are able to turn yourself upside down, attain one single eye, and utter a turning word, you will be able to repay the four obligations above and help the living beings of the three realms below. If you are still unable to do this, reflect again on the tail; then you will be able to grasp it for the first time.

**Verse:**

If it passes through, it will fall into a ditch;  
If it turns back, it will be destroyed.  
This tiny little tail:  
What a strange and marvelous thing it is!

**CASE 39: Unmon and a Mistake in Speech**

**Case:**

A monk once asked Unmon, "The radiance serenely illuminates the whole vast universe..." Before he could finish the first line, Unmon suddenly interrupted, "Aren't those the words of Chôsetsu Shûsai?" The monk replied, "Yes, they are." Unmon said, "You have slipped up into the words."

Afterwards, Zen Master Shishin brought the matter up and said, "Tell me, at what point did he slip?"

**Mumon's Commentary:**

If, as regards this case, you have grasped Unmon's lofty and unapproachable activity and how the monk slipped up in his words, you are worthy to become a teacher of men and heavenly beings. If you are not yet clear about it, you have not even saved yourself.

Verse:

Angling in a swift stream,  
Those greedy for bait will be caught;  
If you open your mouth even a bit,  
Your life will be lost.

**CASE 40: Kicking Over the Water Jug**

Case:

When Master Isan was under Hyakujô, he had the position of tenzo. Hyakujô wanted to choose a master for Mount Taii. He called the head monk and the rest of his disciples together to have them present their views and said that the outstanding person should be sent. Then he took a water jug, put it on the floor, and said, "You may not call this a water jug. What will you call it?" The head monk said, "It cannot be called a wooden sandal." Hyakujô then asked Isan. Isan immediately kicked over the water jug and left. Hyakujô laughed and said, "First monk, you have been defeated by Isan." So he ordered Isan to found the new monastery.

Mumon's Commentary:

Isan summoned up all his valor, but, alas, he could not jump out of Hyakujô's trap. Upon examination, he favors the heavy and not the light. But why? Look! Though he removed his headband, he put on an iron yoke.

Verse:

Tossing away the bamboo buckets and ladles,  
He makes a vigorous thrust and cuts off hindrances;  
Hyakujô's heavy barrier cannot interrupt his rush,  
Countless Buddhas come forth from his toes.

**CASE 41: Bodhidharma Puts the Mind to Rest**

Case:

Bodhidharma sat facing the wall. The second patriarch, standing in the snow, cut off his arm and said, "Your disciple's mind is not yet at peace. I beg you, Master, give it rest." Bodhidharma said, "Bring your mind to me I will put it to rest." The patriarch said, "I have searched for the mind but have never been able to find it." Bodhidharma said, "I have finished putting it to rest for you."

*Mumon's Commentary:*

The broken-toothed old barbarian came thousands of miles across the sea with an active spirit. It can rightly be said that he raised waves where there was no wind. In later life he obtained one disciple, but even he was crippled in his six senses. Ha! The fools do not even know four characters.

*Verse:*

Coming from the West and pointing directly to it –  
All the trouble comes from the transmission;  
The one who disturbs the monasteries  
Is originally you.

*CASE 42: A Woman Comes Out of Samadhi*

*Case:*

Once in the ancient days of the World-Honored One, Manjusri went to the place where Buddhas were assembled and found that all the Buddhas were departing for their original dwelling places. Only a young woman remained, sitting in samadhi close to Shakyamuni Buddha's throne. Manjusri asked the Buddha, "Why can that woman be near the Buddha's throne while I cannot?" The Buddha said, "Just awaken her and raise her up out of samadhi and ask her yourself." Manjusri walked around the woman three times, snapped his fingers once, took her up to the Brahman heaven, and exerted all his supernatural powers, but he could not bring her out of samadhi. The World-Honored One said, "Even a hundred or a thousand Manjusris would not be able to bring her out of samadhi. Down below, past twelve hundred million lands as innumerable as the sand of the Ganges, is the Bodhisattva Momyô. He will be able to arouse her from her samadhi." Instantly the Bodhisattva Momyô emerged out of the earth and made a bow to the World-Honored One, who then gave his command. The Bodhisattva went before the woman and snapped his fingers once. At this, the woman came out of samadhi.

*Mumon's Commentary:*

Old Shakyamuni plays a country drama on stage, but people of shallow realization cannot appreciate it. Just tell me: Manjusri is the teacher of the Seven Buddhas; why can't he bring the woman out of her samadhi while Momyô, who is a bodhisattva in the beginning stage, can?" If you can grasp this completely, you will realize that surging delusive consciousness is nothing other than greatest samadhi.

Verse:

One can awaken her, the other cannot;  
Both have their own freedom.  
A god-mask here and a devil-mask there;  
Even in failure, an elegant performance.

**CASE 43: Shuzan's Shippei**

Case:

Master Shuzan held up a shippei before his disciples and said, "You monks, if you call this a shippei, you are adhering to the fact. If you do not call this a shippei, you are opposing the fact. Tell me, you monks, what will you call it?"

Mumon's Commentary:

If you call this a shippei, you are adhering to the fact. If you do not call this a shippei, you are opposing to the fact. You should not use words. You should not use no-words. Speak at once! Speak at once!

Verse:

Holding up a shippei,  
He issues the order to kill and to give life;  
When adhering and opposing interweave,  
Even Buddhas and patriarchs beg for their lives.

**CASE 44: Bashô's Shujô**

Case:

Master Bashô said to the assembly, "If you have a shujô, I will give it to you. If you have no shujô, I will take it from you."

Mumon's Commentary:

Having it supports us, we wade across a river that has no bridge. Having it accompany us, we return to the village on a moonless night. But if you call it a shujô, you will go to hell as swiftly as an arrow.

Verse:

The depths and shallows everywhere

Are within his grip;  
It supports the heavens and sustain the earth,  
Everywhere it enhances the spirit of our sect.

**CASE 45: Who Is That One?**

Case:

Master and Patriarch En of Tôzan said, "Even Shakyamuni and Maitreya are servants of that one. Just tell me, who is that one?"

Mumon's Commentary:

If you clearly recognize that one, it will be just like meeting your father at the crossroads. It is not necessary to ask others whether it is he or not.

Verse:

Don't draw another's bow;  
Don't ride another's horse;  
Don't speak of another's faults;  
Don't inquire into another's affairs.

**CASE 46: Stepping Forward From the Top of a Pole**

Case:

Master Sekiso said, "How will you step forward from the top of a hundred-foot pole?" Another eminent master of old said, "Even though one is sitting on the top of a hundred-foot pole has entered realization, it is not yet real. He must step forward from the top of the pole and manifest his whole body throughout the world in ten directions."

Mumon's Commentary:

If you can step forward and turn your body around, there will be no place when you are called dishonorable. Even so, just tell me, how do you step forward from the top of the hundred-foot pole? Ahem!

Verse:

Making the eye on the forehead blind,  
One clings to the mark on the scale;  
Throwing away body and life,

One blind person leads many blind people.

**CASE 47: Tosotsu's Three Barriers**

Case:

Master Tosotsu Etsu set up three barriers and asked his students:

"The purpose of making one's way through grasses and asking a master about the subtle truth is only to realize one's self-nature. Now, you venerable monks, where is the self-nature at this very moment?

"When you have attained your self-nature, you can free yourself from life-and-death. How will you free yourself from life-and-death when the light of your eyes is falling to the ground<sup>10</sup>?

"When you have freed yourself from life-and-death, you know where to go. After your four elements have decomposed, where will you go?"

Mumon's Commentary:

If you can say three turning words about these barriers, you will be the master wherever you may be, in close contact with the real essence in all situations. If you have not yet reached this stage, gulping down your food will fill you up quickly, while chewing well will make it more difficult to become hungry again.

Verse:

In one consciousness, we see the whole of eternity;

Eternity is nothing other than right now.

If you see through this one consciousness at this moment,

You see through the one who is seeing right now.

**CASE 48: Kempô's One Way**

Case:

A monk asked Master Kempô in all earnestness, "In a sutra it says, 'Ten-direction Bhagavats, one Way to the gate of nirvana.' I wonder where the Way is." Kempô lifted up his stick, drew a line and said, "Here it is." Later a monk asked Unmon to give instruction about this. Unmon held up his fan and said, " This fan jumps up to the heaven of the thirty-three devas and adheres to the nose of the deva Taishaku. When a carp in the eastern sea is struck with a stick, it rains torrents as though a tray of water is overturned."

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<sup>10</sup> When you are about to die.

*Mumon's Commentary:*

One goes to the bottom of the deepest sea, heaving sand and raising dust. The other stands on the top of the highest mountain and causes white waves to billow up to the sky. On the one hand, they are gripping it tightly; on the other hand, they are letting it loose; so each of them extends a single hand and together they support the essential principle. It is just like two running boys colliding. In this world there will be no one who has realized the truth completely. Examining with the true eye, I find that neither of the old masters knows where the Way is.

*Verse:*

Before a step is taken, the goal is reached;  
Before the tongue is moved, the speech is finished.  
Though you may take the initiative, point by point,  
You must know there is still the all-surpassing hole.

*Amban's Forty ninth CASE:*

Old Zen Master Mumon composed the forty-eight cases and judged the koans of venerable masters of ancient times. He is just like a friend bean-cake vendor who makes his buyers open their mouths and eat his cakes until they are unable either to swallow them down or vomit them up. Even so, Amban<sup>11</sup> wants to bake yet another piece of cake in his red-hot oven to present to Mumon. I don't know where the old master will dig his teeth into it. If he can eat it in one bite, he will emit light and shake the earth. If not, it and the other forty-eight cases will emit all turn into hot sand. Speak at once! Speak at once!

A sutra says: "Stop it! Stop it! It should not be expounded. My Dharma is subtle and difficult to speculate on." Amban says, "Where does the Dharma come from? On what basis does its subtlety lie? What is it when it is expounded? Why call only Bukan a chatterbox<sup>12</sup>? Shakyamuni himself was wordy. The old man raised phantoms and so entangled the descendants of hundreds and thousands of generations in creepers and vines that they are unable to stick their heads out. Such amazing talks as these cases cannot be spooned, though we try to pick them up, or cooked enough, though we steam them in a boiling pot. There was an onlooker who asked in some confusion, After all, how will you decide?" Amban placed his ten fingernails together in supplication and said, "Stop! Stop! It is not to

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<sup>11</sup> His real name was Tei Seishi, Amban being his Zen (or literary) name. He was noted figure in politics as well as in the field of literature, and he died in 1251 in the Sung Dynasty.

<sup>12</sup> When Master Bunkan was abbot at Kokuseiji Temple in Mt. Tendai, Kanzan and Jittoku visited him in the kitchen. He greeted the two, saying "Here come Bodhisattvas Manjusri and Samantabhadra!" Upon this the two named him "Bunkan, the chatterbox."

be expounded. My Dharma is subtle and difficult to speculate about." Then he suddenly drew a small circle over the two characters for "difficult" and "speculate" and showed it to the people. The five thousand scrolls of the Tripitaka<sup>13</sup> and Vimalakirti's<sup>14</sup> gate of non-duality are all in it.

Verse:

If one says fire is light,  
Do not respond, shake your head.  
Only a thief recognizes a thief,  
At one question he immediately nods.

Early summer of the sixth year of Shun'yû (1246 A.D.)

Written by Amban at a fishing villa by West Lake.

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(excerpts from: Y. KOUN, The Gateless Gate, Boston 2004)

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<sup>13</sup> The three parts of the Buddhist scriptures: sutras, vinaya, and sastras..

<sup>14</sup> Vimalakirti was a famous lay student of Shakyamuni Buddha.