

Introduction

These chapters are summaries of the teishoes I gave during the first half of 2019. Between chapters I have included some poems of *Therigatha*. “*The Therigatha*, the ninth book of the *Khuddaka Nikaya* consists of 73 poems – 522 stanzas in all – in which the early nuns (*bhikkhunis*) recount their struggles and accomplishments along the road to arahantship. Their stories are told with often heart-breaking honesty and beauty, revealing the deeply human side of these extraordinary women, and thus serve as inspiring reminders of our own potential to follow in their footsteps.” This is the introduction Thanissaro Bhikku gives in the website. I thank Thanissaro Bhikku for the translation and making the poems available for free. ,

My heartfelt thanks to Ramakrishnan of Cre-A publishing. Despite his busy schedule, he has been generous with his time and energy in getting the book published. Many thanks also to Sandhya Sundar for the editing.

The title of the book is inspired by the koan of Master Chosa (Tschang-scha), which comes in Hekiganroku Case 36:

Chosa in pursuit of falling blossoms

One day Chosa went for a walk. When he returned to the gate, the head monk said, “Chosa, where have you been strolling?”

Chosa said, “I have come from walking in the hills.”

The head monk said, “Where have you been?”

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Chosa said, "First I went following the fragrant grasses, and now I have returned in pursuit of the falling blossoms."

The head monk said, "You are full of the spring."

Chosa said, "Better than the autumn dews falling on the lotus leaves."

[Setcho says, "Thank you for your answer."]

Chapter 1

Seen once, may not be seen again!

The Main 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.

The Verse

In front of a fool,
Do not talk about dreams;
The barbarian has no beard:
It’s adding obscurity to clarity (Mumonkan 4).

Master Wakuan Shitai (Huo An, 1108–1179) was a Rinzai master. As you can see, he lived during the Song era (960–1279), in the post-Tang era, after the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. Not much is known of him. This koan is an extraordinary one.

‘Western Barbarian’ refers to Bodhidharma. ‘Western’ refers to India, which is west of China. Bodhidharma is normally pictured with a bushy beard. Now, Wakuan asks why he has no beard!

Toshihiko Izutsu makes some fine comments on this paradoxical reality of Being and Emptiness: “Reality is presented as a combination

of silence and speech just as it was in the spring scenery of Master Feng Hsueh, but in an incomparably more concise and straightforward way. The aspect of silence is represented in this verbal picture by the beardless Bodhidharma. There is not even a single hair visible on his face. It refers to the aspect of Nothingness of Reality, the sunyata, which is absolutely inarticulate, 'limitlessly open' with no distinction whatsoever. The aspect of speech is represented by his being 'beard-less.' The word 'beard' is actually used. The word, as soon as it is uttered, inevitably produces a semantic entity by its intrinsic faculty of articulation. Something becomes articulated into an entity, the object – 'beard.' But it is immediately negated – 'beard-less.' ...

“The combination of these two aspects verbally presents the primary level of Reality in its two essential forms. The absolute Nothingness discloses itself in a flash in the form of a beard, then it disappears into its original darkness. The semantic articulation is made, but it is immediately nullified. It is as though no articulation were ever made. Master Huo An is demanding that his students grasp instantaneously, at this precise fleeting moment, the structure of the integral whole of Reality. ...

“This, however, is by no means an easy task to accomplish. For the effect of articulation is persistent. Once the 'beard' is articulated out of Nothingness, it tends to remain as a semantic entity, even if the word is immediately negated. For the 'beard' continues to subsist in a negative form. The 'beard-less' is posited as a negative entity. The negation then comes to stand on a par with affirmation on the same level of discourse, and the original negation, i.e., the sunyata is forever lost. Master Wumen referring to this danger says in his poem on this koan:

Do not talk about your dream
In the presence of fools.
The barbarian has no beard, you say.
You simply add obscurity to what is clear in itself.