

The Urban Well

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Shibayama Roshi, *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan*

Joshu's "Mu"

KOAN

A monk once asked Master Joshu, "'Has a dog the Buddha Nature or not?'" Joshu said, "Mu!"

MUMON'S COMMENTARY

In studying Zen, one must pass the barriers set up by ancient Zen Masters. For the attainment of incomparable satori, one has to cast away his discriminating mind. Those who have not passed the barrier and have not cast away the discriminating mind are all phantoms haunting trees and plants.

Now, tell me, what is the barrier of the Zen Masters? Just this "Mu"— it is the barrier of Zen. It is thus called "the gateless barrier of Zen." Those who have passed the barrier will not only see Joshu clearly, but will go hand in hand with all the Masters of the past, see them face to face. You will see with the same eye that they see with and hear with the same ear. Wouldn't it be wonderful? Don't you want to pass the barrier? Then concentrate yourself into this "Mu," with your 360 bones and 84,000 pores, making your whole body one great inquiry. Day and night work intently at it. Do not attempt nihilistic or dualistic interpretations. It is like having bolted a red-hot iron ball. You try to vomit it but cannot.

Cast away your illusory discriminating knowledge and consciousness accumulated up to now, and keep on working harder. After a while, when your efforts come to fruition, all the oppositions (such as in and out) will naturally be identified. You will then be like a dumb person who has had a wonderful dream: he only knows it personally, within himself. Suddenly you break through the barrier; you will astonish heaven and shake the earth.

It is as if you have snatched the great sword of General Kan. You kill the Buddha if you meet him; you kill the ancient Masters if you meet them. On the brink of life and death you are utterly free, and in the six realms and the four modes of life you live, with great joy, a genuine life in complete freedom.

Now, how should one strive? With might and main work at this "Mu," and be "Mu." If you do not stop or waver in your striving, then behold, when the Dharma candle is lighted, darkness is at once enlightened.

MUMON'S POEM

The dog! The Buddha Nature!
The Truth is manifested in full.
A moment of yes-and-no:

Lost are your body and soul.

TEISHO ON THE KOAN

This koan is extremely short and simple. Because of this simplicity, it is uniquely valuable and is an excellent koan.

Joshu is the name of a place in northern China, and Master Junen (778- 897) who lived in Kannon-in Temple at Joshu, is now generally known as Master Joshu. He was an exceptionally long-lived Zen Master who died at the age of one hundred and twenty years.

Joshu was fifty-seven years old when his teacher Nansen died. The great persecution of Buddhism by Emperor Bu-so (845) took place in Joshu's sixty-seventh year, Master Rinzai Gigen died (867) in Joshu's ninetieth year, and Master Gyozan died when he was in his one hundred and fifteenth year. This means that Joshu lived toward the end of the T'ang dynasty when Zen with its creative spirits flourished in China. At that time Joshu was one of the leading figures in Zen circles. People who described his Zen said, "His lips give off light," and greatly respected him.

Joshu was born in a village near Soshufu in the southwestern part of Santosho and entered a Buddhist temple when he was a young boy. Later, while he was still young, he came to Chishu to study under Master Nansen. When he first met Nansen, the latter was resting in bed. Nansen asked him, "Where have you been recently?" "At Zuizo [literally "auspicious image"], Master," replied Joshu. "Did you then see the Auspicious Image?" the Master asked. Joshu said, "I did not see the Image, but I have seen a reclining Tathagata." Nansen then got up and asked, "Do you already have a Master to study under or not?" Joshu replied, "I have." Nansen asked, "Who is he?" At this, Joshu came closer to Nansen and, bowing to him, said, "I am glad to see you so well in spite of such a severe cold." Nansen recognized in him unusual character and allowed him to be his disciple. After that, Joshu steadily carried on his Zen studies under Nansen.

When Joshu was fifty-seven years old, his Master Nansen died, and four years later Joshu started on a pilgrimage with the determination: "Even a seven-year-old child, if he is greater than I am, I'll ask him to teach me. Even a hundred-year-old man, if I am greater than he is, I'll teach him." He continued on the pilgrimage to deepen and refine his Zen spirituality until he reached his eightieth year. Later he stayed at Kannon-in Temple, in Joshu, and was active as a leading Zen Master of the time in northern China, together with Rinzai.

In the biography of Joshu a series of mondo are recorded, from which this koan is extracted. There have been many attempts to interpret these mondo and to explain the koan in relation to them. We do not have to worry about such attempts here but should directly grip the koan itself. Knowing well its context, Master Mumon presents a simple, direct, and clear koan. Its simplicity plays an important role.

"A monk once asked Master Joshu, 'Has a dog the Buddha Nature or not?'" This monk was well aware that all sentient beings have the Buddha Nature without exception. This is therefore a piercingly effective and unapproachable question which would not be answered if the Master were to say Yes or No. The monk is demanding that Joshu show him the real Buddha Nature, and he is not asking for its interpretation or conceptual understanding. What a cutting question!

Joshu, like the genuine capable Master that he was, answered "Mu!" without the least hesitation. He threw himself—the whole universe—out as "Mu" in front of the questioner. Here is no Joshu, no world, but just "Mu." This is the koan of Joshu's "Mu."

The experience of the Buddha Nature itself is creatively expressed here by "Mu." Although literally "Mu" means No, in this case it points to the incomparable satori which transcends both yes and no, to the religious experience of the Truth one can attain when he casts away his discriminating mind. It

has nothing to do with the dualistic interpretation of yes and no, being and nonbeing. It is Truth itself, the Absolute itself.

Joshu, the questioning monk, and the dog are however only incidental to the story, and they do not have any vital significance in themselves. Unless one grasps the koan within himself as he lives here and now, it ceases to be a real koan. We should not read it as an old story; you yourself have to be directly “Mu” and make not only the monk, but Joshu as well, show the white feather. Then the Buddha Nature is “Mu”; Joshu is “Mu.” Not only that, you yourself and the whole universe are nothing but “Mu.” Further, “Mu” itself falls far short, it is ever the unnamable “it.”

Master Daie says, “Joshu’s ‘Mu’—work directly at it. Be just it.” He is telling us to be straightforwardly no-self, be “Mu,” and present it right here. This is a very inviting instruction indeed. Once my own teacher, Master Bukai, threw his *nyoi* (a stick about fifty centimeters long which a Zen Master always carries with him) in front of me and demanded, “Now, transcend the yes-and-no of this *nyoi*!” and he did not allow me even a moment’s hesitation. Training in Zen aims at the direct experience of breaking through to concrete Reality. That breaking through to Reality has to be personally attained by oneself. Zen can never be an idea or knowledge, which are only shadows of Reality. You may reason out that “Mu” transcends both yes and no, that it is the Absolute Oneness where all dualistic discrimination is exhausted. While you are thus conceptualizing, real “Mu” is lost forever.

My teacher also asked me once, “Show me the form of ‘Mu’!” When I said, “It has no form whatsoever,” he pressed me, saying “I want to see that form which has no-form.” How cutting and drastic! Unless one can freely and clearly present the form of “Mu,” it turns out to be a meaningless corpse.

In the biography of Master Hakuin we read the following moving story of his first encounter with his teacher, Master Shoju. Shoju asked Hakuin, “Tell me, what is Joshu’s ‘Mu’?” Hakuin elatedly replied, “Pervading the universe! Not a spot whatsoever to take hold of it” As soon as he had given that answer, Shoju took hold of Hakuin’s nose and gave it a twist. “I am quite at ease to take hold of it,” said Shoju, laughing aloud. The next moment he released it and abused Hakuin, “You! Dead monk in a cave! Are you self-satisfied with such ‘Mu’?” This completely put Hakuin out of countenance.

We have to realize that this one word “Mu” has such exhaustive depth and lucidity that once one has really grasped it as his own he has the ability to penetrate all Zen koans.

Often people remark that “Mu” is an initial koan for beginners, which is a great mistake. A koan in Zen is fundamentally different from questions and problems in general. Etymologically the term koan means “the place where the truth is.” In actual training its role is to smash up our dualistic consciousness and open our inner spiritual eye to a new vista. In actual cases there may be differences in the depth of the spirituality and ability of Zen students who break through a koan. This is inevitable for human beings living in this world. For any koan, however, there should be no such discrimination or gradation as an initial koan for beginners or difficult ones for the advanced. An old Zen Master said, “If you break through one koan, hundreds and thousands of koan have all been penetrated at once.” Another Master said, “It is like cutting a reel of thread: one cut, and all is cut.”

The use of a koan in Zen training developed spontaneously in the southern Sung dynasty in China when a reminiscent, traditionalist tendency began to prevail in Zen circles. In the early period of the southern Sung, Joshu’s “Mu” was already being used widely as a koan. Mumon himself was driven into the abyss of Great Doubt by this koan and finally had the experience of breaking through it. Out of his own training and experience, he must have extracted the most essential part from several mondo and presented it to his disciples as a simple, direct koan.

This koan is taken from a mondo between Joshu and a monk, and *Joshu Zenji Goroku* (“Sayings of Master Joshu”) and a few other books record similar mondo. In the chapter “Joshu Junen” in *Goto Egen*, volume 4, we read, “A monk asked Joshu, ‘Has a dog the Buddha Nature or not?’ The Master said, ‘Mu.’ The monk asked, ‘From Buddhas above down to creeping creatures like ants, all have the Buddha Nature. Why is it that a dog has not?’ ‘Because he has ignorance and attachment,’ the Master replied.”

Joshu Zenji Goroku has the following mondo: “A monk asked, ‘Has a dog the Buddha Nature or not?’ The Master said, ‘Mu.’ Monk: ‘Even creeping creatures all have the Buddha Nature. Why is it that the dog has not?’ Master: ‘Because he has ignorance and attachment.’”

Another monk asked Joshu, “Has a dog the Buddha Nature or not?” The Master said, “U” (Yes). The monk asked, “Having the Buddha Nature, why is he in such a dog-body?” Master: “Knowingly he dared to be so.”

Although generally Joshu is supposed to have originated this mondo on the Buddha Nature, we read the following mondo in the biography of Master Ikan (755-817) of Kozenji at Keicho: Monk: “Has a dog the Buddha Nature or not?” Master: “Yes” (U). Monk: “Have you, O Master, the Buddha Nature or not?” Master: “I have not.” Monk: “All sentient beings have the Buddha Nature. Why is it that you alone, Master, have not?” Master: “I am not among all sentient beings.” Monk: “If you are not among sentient beings, are you then a Buddha or not?” Master: “I am not a Buddha.” Monk: “What kind of thing are you after all?” Master: “I am not a thing either.” Monk: “Can it be seen and thought of?” Master: “Even if you try to think about it and know it, you are unable to do so. It is therefore called ‘unknowable.’” (*Keitoku Dento-roku*, volume 7)

Let us put aside for the time being historical studies of the koan. “Mu” as a koan is to open our spiritual eye to Reality, to “Mu,” that is, to Joshu’s Zen —this is the sole task of this koan, and everything else is just complementary and not of primary importance. We may simply read about it for our information.

All sentient beings without exception have the Buddha Nature. This is the fundamental Truth of non-dualism and equality. On the other hand, this actual world of ours is dualistic and full of discriminations. The above mondo presents to us the basic contradiction between the fundamental Truth of non-dualism and actual phenomena. The ancient Masters made us face the fact that we human beings from the very beginning have been living in this fundamental contradiction. It was the compassion of the Masters that led them to try thus to intensify their disciples’ Great Doubt, their spiritual quest, and finally lead them to satori by breaking through it. If here one really breaks through this koan, which uniquely presents before him the core of human contradiction, he can clearly see for himself with his genuine Zen eye what these mondo are trying to tell us.

TEISHO ON MUMON’S COMMENTARY

Mumon comments: “In studying Zen, one must pass the barriers set up by ancient Zen Masters. For the attainment of incomparable satori, one has to cast away his discriminating mind. Those who have not passed the barrier and have not cast away the discriminating mind are all phantoms haunting trees and plants.

“Now, tell me, what is the barrier of the Zen Masters? Just this ‘Mu’— it is the barrier of Zen. It is thus called ‘the gateless barrier of Zen.’ Those who have passed the barrier will not only see Joshu clearly, but will go hand in hand with all the Masters of the past, see them face to face. You will see with the same eye that they see with and hear with the same ear. Wouldn’t it be wonderful? Don’t you want to pass the barrier? Then concentrate yourself into this ‘Mu,’ with your 360 bones and 84,000

pores, making your whole body one great inquiry. Day and night work intently at it. Do not attempt nihilistic or dualistic interpretations. It is like having bolted a red-hot iron ball. You try to vomit it but cannot.

“Cast away your illusory discriminating knowledge and consciousness accumulated up to now, and keep on working harder. After a while, when your efforts come to fruition, all the oppositions (such as in and out) will naturally be identified. You will then be like a dumb person who has had a wonderful dream: he only knows it personally, within himself. Suddenly you break through the barrier; you will astonish heaven and shake the earth.

“It is as if you have snatched the great sword of General Kan. You kill the Buddha if you meet him; you kill the ancient Masters if you meet them. On the brink of life and death you are utterly free, and in the six realms and the four modes of life you live, with great joy, a genuine life in complete freedom.

“Now, how should one strive? With might and main work at this ‘Mu,’ and be ‘Mu.’ If you do not stop or waver in your striving, then behold, when the Dharma candle is lighted, darkness is at once enlightened.”

According to Master Mumon’s biography, he stayed in a cave in a mountain where he practiced zazen and disciplined himself for six long years. In spite of such hard training he could not fundamentally satisfy his spiritual quest. It was this koan of “Joshu’s ‘Mu’” that made him plunge into the abyss of Great Doubt and finally attain satori, breaking through it as if the bottom had fallen out of a barrel. His commentary on this koan is therefore especially kind and detailed. He tells us most frankly of the hard training he himself went through and tries to guide Zen students on the basis of his own experiences.

“In studying Zen, one must pass the barriers set up by the ancient Zen Masters. For the attainment of incomparable satori, one has to cast away his discriminating mind.”

First Mumon tells us what must be the right attitude for a Zen student, that is, what is fundamentally required of him in studying Zen. As Master Daiye says, “Satori is the fundamental experience in Zen.” One has to cast his ordinary self away and be reborn as a new Self in a different dimension. In other words, the student must personally have the inner experience called satori, by which he is reborn as the True Self. This fundamental experience of awakening is essential in Zen. Although various different expressions are used when talking about the fact of this religious awakening, it cannot be real Zen without it. Mumon therefore declares at the very beginning that “in studying Zen one must pass the barriers set up by the ancient Zen Masters.” The barrier of the ancient Zen Masters is the barrier to Zen, and the obstacle to transcend is the dualism of yes and no, subject and object. Practically, the sayings of ancient Masters, which are called koan, are such barriers.

The phrase “incomparable satori” indicates the eternal emancipation or absolute freedom that is attained by directly breaking through the Zen barrier. In order to break through it, Mumon stresses that one must once and for all cast away his discriminating mind completely. “Discriminating mind” is our ordinary consciousness, which is dualistic, discriminating, and the cause of all sorts of illusions. Mumon asks us to cast this away. To get rid of it requires that one’s whole being must be the koan. There should be nothing left, and the secret of Zen lies in this really throwing oneself away. One does not have to ask what would be likely to happen after that; whatever happens would naturally and automatically come about without any seeking for it. What is important here is for him to actually do it himself.

“Those who have not passed the barrier and have not cast away the discriminating mind are all phantoms haunting trees and plants.”

There is a superstition that the phantoms of those who after death are not in peace haunt trees and plants and cast evil spells on people. Here it means those people who do not have a fundamental

spiritual basis, those who cling to words and logic and are enslaved by dualistic views, without grasping the subjective point of view.

Mumon says that anyone who is unable to pass the barrier of the old Masters or to wipe out his discriminating mind—that is, if his Zen mind is not awakened—is like a phantom, without reality. There is no significance in such an existence. Thus, by using extreme and abusive language Mumon tries to make us ashamed of our unenlightened existence and to arouse in us the great spiritual quest.

“Now, tell me,” Mumon demands, “what is the barrier of the Zen Masters?” Having aroused our interest, he answers himself that this “Mu” is the ultimate barrier of Zen. If once one has broken through it, he is the master of all the barriers and the forty-eight koan and commentaries of the Mumonkan are all his tools. This is therefore called “The Gateless Barrier of Zen,” Mumon remarks. We should remember however that it is not only the first koan, but that any of the forty-eight koan of the Mumonkan is the barrier of Zen.

“Those who have passed the barrier will not only see Joshu clearly, but will go hand in hand with all the Masters in the past, see them face to face. You will see with the same eye that they see with and hear with the same ear. Wouldn’t it be wonderful?”

Mumon tells us how wonderful it is to experience breaking through the barrier and to live the life of satori. Once the Gate is broken through, ultimate peace is attained. You can get hold of old Joshu alive. Further, you will live in the same spirituality with all the Zen Masters, see them face to face, and enjoy the Truth of Oneness. How wonderful, how splendid! He praises the life of satori in the highest terms. There are no ages in satori; no distinctions of I and you, space and time. Wherever it may be and whenever it may be, just here and now you see and you hear—it is Joshu, it is your Self, and “Mu.” There can be no greater joy. To experience this is to attain eternal peace.

“Don’t you want to pass the barrier? Then concentrate yourself into this ‘Mu’ with your 360 bones and 84,000 pores, making your whole body one great inquiry.”

Having described the great joy of satori, Mumon now turns to his disciples and speaks directly to them, “Are there any among you who want to pass this barrier of the ancient Masters?” He then goes on to give practical instructions as to how they should carry on their training in order to break through the barrier—how to attain satori. He tells them to inquire, with their heart and soul, what it is to transcend yes and no, you and I. They are to cast their whole being, from head to foot, into this inquiry and carry on with it. There will be no world, no self, but just one Great Doubt. This is “Mu.” “Just be ‘Mu!’” Mumon urges the disciples. “To concentrate” is to be unified and identified.

“To concentrate oneself into ‘Mu’ is for ‘Mu’ and the self to be one—to be one and then to transcend both ‘Mu’ and the self.

“Day and night work intently at it; do not attempt nihilistic or dualistic interpretations.”

Mumon’s instructions continue: never be negligent, even for a short while, but do zazen and devote yourself to the koan day and night. An old Master described this training process, saying, “Work like a mother hen trying to hatch her eggs.” Do not misunderstand “Mu” as nihilistic emptiness. Never in the world take it as a dualistic No in opposition to Yes. Needless to say, it has nothing to do with intellectual discrimination or dualistic reasoning. It is utterly beyond all description.

“It is like having bolted a red-hot iron ball; you try to vomit it but cannot. Cast away your illusory discriminating knowledge and consciousness accumulated up to now, and keep on working harder. After a while, when your efforts come to fruition, all the oppositions (such as in and out) will naturally be identified. You will then be like a dumb person who has had a wonderful dream: he only knows it personally, within himself.”

“Like having bolted a red-hot iron ball” describes the one who, with his whole being, body and soul, has plunged into the Great Doubt, the spiritual quest. All the emotions are exhausted, all the

intellect has come to its extremity; there is not an inch for the discrimination to enter. This is the state of utmost spiritual intensification. When it is hot, the whole universe is nothing but the heat; when you see, it is just one pure act of seeing—there is no room there for any thought to come in. In such a state, Mumon warns us, never give up but straightforwardly carry on with your striving. In such a state no thought of discrimination can be present.

“Illusory discriminating knowledge and consciousness accumulated up to now” refers to our dualistically working mind we have had before. No trace of it is now left. You are thoroughly lucid and transparent like a crystal. Subject and object, in and out, being and nonbeing are just one, and this very one ceases to be one any longer. Rinzai said, describing this state, “The whole universe is sheer darkness.” Hakuin said, “It was like sitting in an ice cave a million miles thick.” This is the moment when the I and the world are both altogether gone. This is exactly the moment when one’s discriminating mind is emptied and cast away. When one is in the abyss of absolute “Mu” in actual training, the inexpressible moment comes upon him—the moment when “Mu” is awakened to “Mu,” that is, when he is revived as the self of no-self. At this mysterious moment, he is like a dumb person who has had a wonderful dream, for he is fully aware of it, but is unable to use words to express it. The Absolute Nothingness (“Mu”) is awakened to itself. This is the moment of realization when subject-object opposition is altogether transcended. To describe it we have to use such words as inexpressible or mysterious. “You will then be like a dumb person who has had a wonderful dream: he only knows it personally, within himself.”

Then Mumon tries again to describe the experience of the one who has just broken through the barrier: “Suddenly you break through the barrier; you will astonish heaven and shake the earth.” I myself, however, should like to reverse the order of these two sentences and say, “Suddenly you break through the barrier; you will astonish heaven and shake the earth. You will then be like a dumb person who has had a wonderful dream: he only knows it personally, within himself.” This would be more faithful to actual experience. Zen calls this experience “incomparable satori,” or “to die a Great Death once and to revive from death.” Mumon described his experience of attaining satori by saying that “all beings on earth have opened their eyes.” This is the most important and essential process one has to go through in Zen training.

“It is as if you have snatched the great sword of General Kan. You kill the Buddha if you meet him; you kill the ancient Masters if you meet them. On the brink of life and death, you are utterly free, and in the six realms and the four modes of life you live, with great joy, a genuine life in complete freedom.”

General Kan was a brave general famous in ancient China. With his great sword, he used to freely cut and conquer his enemies. Once one attains the satori of this “Mu,” his absolute inner freedom can be compared to the man who has the great sword of that famous strong general in his own hand.

Having experienced this exquisite moment of breaking through the barrier, one’s self, the world, and everything change. It is just like one who was born blind getting his sight. Here Mumon tells us how absolutely free he now is. He sees, he hears, and everything, as it is, is given new life. Mumon in his own poem speaks of this wonder, “Mount Sumeru jumps up and dances.” Only those who have actually experienced it themselves can really appreciate what Mumon sings here.

“You kill the Buddha if you meet him; you kill the ancient Masters if you meet them.”

This expression is often misunderstood. Zen postulates absolute freedom in which all attachments and restraints are completely wiped away. The Buddha therefore is to be cast away and so are the Patriarchs. Any restraints whatsoever in the mind are to be cast away. For the one who has passed through the abyss of Great Doubt, transcending subject and object, you and I, and has been revived as the True Self, can there be anything to disturb him? The term “to kill” should not be

interpreted in our ordinary ethical sense. “To kill” is to transcend names and ideas. If you meet the Buddha, the Buddha is “Mu.” If you meet ancient Masters, they are “Mu.” Therefore he says that if you pass the barrier you will “not only see Joshu clearly, but go hand in hand with all the Masters in the past, see them face to face. You will see with the same eye that they see with and hear with the same ear.”

To live is an aspect of “Mu”; to die is also an aspect of “Mu.” If you stand, your standing is “Mu.” If you sit, your sitting is “Mu.” The six realms refer to the six different stages of existence, i.e., the celestial world, human world, fighting world, beasts, hungry beings, and hell. The four modes are four different forms of life, i.e., viviparous, oviparous, from moisture, and metamorphic. Originally the phrase referred to various stages of life in transmigration, depending on the law of causation. The reference to the six realms and the four modes of life means, “under whatever circumstances you may live, in whatever situation you may find yourself.” Both favorable conditions and adverse situations are “Mu,” working differently as you live, at any time, at any place. How wonderful it is to live such a serene life with perfect freedom, the spiritual freedom of the one who has attained religious peace!

“Now, how should one strive? With might and main work at this ‘Mu,’ and *be* ‘Mu.’”

Mumon once again gives his direct instruction on how one should carry out his Zen training in order to break through the barrier of the Zen Masters to attain incomparable satori and his Zen personality. How should he work at “Mu”? All that can be said is: “‘Be just ‘Mu’ with might and main.’” To be “Mu” is to cast everything—yourself and the universe—into it.

“If you do not stop or waver in your striving, then behold, when the Dharma candle is lighted, the darkness is at once enlightened.”

This can be simply taken as a candle on the altar. Once one’s mind bursts open to the truth of “Mu,” the ignorance is at once enlightened, just as all darkness is gone when a candle is lighted.

Mumon warns his disciples that they should not stop or waver in their striving. In other words, he says that with might and main you must be “Mu” through and through, and never stop striving to attain that. An old Japanese Zen Master has a waka poem:

When your bow is broken and your arrows are exhausted,
There, shoot!
Shoot with your whole being!

A Western philosopher has said, “Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.” When man is at his very extremity and still goes on striving with his whole being, without stopping, the moment to break through suddenly comes to him. This is the moment of fundamental change when one is reborn as a True Self. It is as if a candle were lighted in darkness. Darkness is at once illumined.

Master Engo has a poem in the *Hekigan-roku*:

It is like cutting a reel of thread:
One cut, and all is cut.
It is like dyeing a reel of thread:
One dip and all is dyed.

I join Mumon in saying, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful!” In his commentary Mumon has tried his best to tell us how exquisite and wonderful true Zen attainment is, and pointed out the way to experience it.

TEISHO ON MUMON'S POEM

The dog! the Buddha Nature!
The Truth is manifested in full.
A moment of yes-and-no:
Lost are your body and soul.

Following his detailed commentary on Joshu's 'Mu,' Mumon wrote this poem to comment on it once more, so that he might clearly and simply present the essence of satori.

He first presents the koan itself directly to us: "The dog! the Buddha Nature!" What else is needed here? As it is, it is "Mu." As they are, they are "Mu." Those who really know it will fully understand it all by this.

The second line says, "The Truth is manifested in full." The original Chinese term used for Truth literally means "True Law," that is, the Buddha's fundamental command. It is nothing but "Mu" itself. Look, it is right in front of you, Mumon says. A blind person fails to see the sunlight, but it is not the fault of the sun.

"A moment of yes-and-no: lost are your body and soul." Out of his compassion Mumon adds the last two lines, which say that if even a thought of discrimination comes, the truth of "Mu" is altogether gone. When one is really "Mu" through and through, to call it "Mu" is already incorrect, for that belongs to the dualistic world of letters. "Mu" here is just temporarily used in order to transcend U (yes) and Mu (no). If one is afraid of losing his body and soul, what can be accomplished? The secret here can be communicated only to those who have once died the Great Death.