



## Mayoku Comes to Shokei

Today's teisho is Case 31 in the *Hekiganroku*, The Blue Rock Collection. Case 31 is entitled, "Mayoku Comes to Shokei."

### Engo's Introduction

*With subconscious stirring, images appear; with awareness, ice forms. Even if there is no stirring and no awareness, you have not yet escaped from the confinement of the fox's hole. If you truly penetrate in your practice and become master of it, you will experience not a trace of obstruction. You will be like a dragon supported by deep waters, like a tiger that commands its mountain retreat. Then, if you let go, even tiles and pebbles become illuminating; if you hold fast, even pure gold loses its luster. And the koans of the old masters will become tedious. Tell me, what am I talking about? See the following.*

### Main Subject

*Mayoku came to Shokei carrying his bell staff with him, walked around Shokei's seat three times, shook his staff, ringing the bells, stuck it in the ground, and stood up straight. Shokei said, "Good." [Setcho says, "A mistake."] Mayoku then came to Nansen, walked around Nansen's seat, shook his staff, ringing the bells, stuck it in the ground, and stood up straight. Nansen said, "Wrong." Mayoku said, "Shokei said, 'Good'. Why do you say, 'Wrong'?" Nansen said, "Shokei is 'good,' but you are wrong. You are blown about by the wind. That will lead to destruction."*

### Setcho's Verse

*This mistake, that mistake,  
Never take them away!  
In the four seas, the waves subside;  
A hundred rivers flow quietly to the sea.*

*The twelve bells of the staff tinkled up high;  
Empty and silent is the road to the gate.  
No, not empty and silent;  
The enlightened man must take medicine  
For the illness of "having no illness."*

[Three bells]

I want to thank everybody for coming here on this beautiful spring morning. Only three or four days ago everything was gray and lifeless. The trees were still bare and the buds had not yet begun to open. Overnight, it seems, the flowers have blossomed. All of this is really astonishing, as

though from the time we started sitting today until this very moment, the leaves on the trees have grown perceptibly. I suppose that's possible. Leaves have to grow some time, after all—why shouldn't they this morning?

You could have spent your Saturday in many ways. You could have gone up to New England this weekend. You could have driven south to Myrtle Beach. But without you, none of what we've done would have happened at all—have you ever thought of that? When people by the tens of thousands go to see a great bodhisattva like the Dalai Lama, they rightly feel a deep sense of gratitude. “He has made all this happen,” they think. But it's also true that the event could not have taken place without them. That is Dependent Co-arising 101—all things happening together. Is it possible that this also applies to the leaves and the flowers? Have we in some way helped them to emerge?

The koan today is an important one, maybe the single most important koan in the whole Blue Rock Collection. It's a koan about enlightenment itself, and I hardly need to say that most of us practice with an eye toward that experience. We may not know what enlightenment involves but it's the reason that we meditate. The Buddha taught that by doing seated meditation we can cut through our illusions and see things as they really are. And then, we believe, our suffering will stop. I'm sure you know the story of the Buddha's life—his encounter with old age, sickness and death, his long search, his many struggles and his awakening. And when he woke up, the Buddha is said to have achieved anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, complete enlightenment without karmic remainder. Because we are the Buddha's followers, we've come here to practice in his Way and to liberate ourselves. And to do this we gave up our Saturday. We arose early and drove here. We sat on the cushion for a number of hours and our goal was this lofty one of enlightenment.

I don't know if there's such a thing as reincarnation. I don't know if in some past life I was a monk or practiced Zen. On the cushion, let me say honestly, I've never had recollections of past lives. But when I first started reading about Zen, it resonated with me very deeply. I became so excited that I couldn't put the book down. And when I had the chance to practice meditation for the first time with my first teacher Genki Roshi, I was totally sold on it--totally committed. I would have done whatever he said. There was something about this practice which deeply moved me. And, of course, I'm not alone in my response. This Zen is very powerful and transformative. Simply in hearing about this path, many people become elated. The energy in your body and heart are roused and you want to practice in the same way that a fine horse wants to run through the fields after a long winter of confinement. This definitely happened to me. I wanted to be liberated from my unhappiness. But more than that, I wanted to live more fully. I wanted to break through and be at the heart of things.

So Zen was a wonderful opportunity. Even now, there's nothing else in my life that's remotely comparable. And it seems that many people here today feel much the same way. Part of the promise of Zen, as I say, is that we can free ourselves from “birth and death,” free ourselves from suffering. Suffering has multiple causes, of course, but one way to explain it is to say that it's caused by our being out of sync with the true nature of things. And that lack of harmony produces pain.

I remember that when I was younger I became romantically involved with a young woman who was really quite a lovely human being. She was very intelligent and creative, an artist. I have no

idea what she's doing now but she was talented, thoughtful and also quite attractive. Although I so much wanted her to like me, our relationship was a disaster. At the time I was really very crude-spirited and unprepared for a relationship. We both tried hard but we couldn't make it work. And this sort of disconnection is quite typical in life. We want events to go a certain way but we can't seem to get it right. We can't seem to be in sync.

At one time I wanted to be a novelist. I wanted to write a great novel or, at least, a good novel. And after a year the novel I wrote that turned out to be, in fact, just terrible. I simply couldn't make it work. I wanted so much to have something wonderful happen and it just didn't happen. This kind of disappointment can take other forms as well. A friend of mine, a man I went to college with, wanted to be a doctor. But he just couldn't do the chemistry. By the time he was a junior, he knew that his doctor dream would never come true. When these disappointments happen to us, we feel as though we're out of harmony with the world. We're stuck and it's very difficult, as in the dream I'm sure you've all had where your legs can't move even though you desperately need to run away. Like all Zen koans, this one promises that life doesn't have to be like that. It doesn't have to be a constant struggle, with screw ups, disappointments, and paralysis. Somehow life can unfold easily, almost without effort, or at least that's what the koan seems to promise us.

The koan says, "With subconscious stirring, images appear. With awareness, ice forms. Even if there is no stirring, no awareness, you have not yet escaped from the confinement of the fox's hole." The first two lines here refer to the Yogacara model of the mind on which Zen practice relies. The way we see the world is shaped unconsciously. What we see and how we see are not a free choice, but predetermined by our mental habits. And this unconscious action is followed by the action of our consciousness, which is still more limiting. Even before we are consciously aware, we're already slightly trapped. And then our consciousness doesn't set us free, but makes illusion even harder to penetrate, like a sheet of ice.

If all this is true, you must admit, it's quite a predicament. We're caught in a deep hole created by a fox, a magical fox who leads down the hole where we wander hopelessly. To be caught in the fox's hole is to fail in seeking your life's goal, or to screw up at work on a crucial project, or to find yourself unable to connect with somebody you care about. It's being in the wrong place at the wrong time; it's doing something inadvertently that causes you shame later on. We hate being in that fox's hole, caught, trapped, bumping up against the walls, unable to get out.

When I was younger I felt like such a loser, always somehow off balance. I couldn't seem to find my proper element. Was it water, fire, earth or air? I remember going into an eyewear store in Bremerton, Washington, where a woman behind the counter looked at me in the most puzzling way. After recently completing with college, I was working at a construction site probably because I didn't have a clue about what I should do instead. This woman looked at me—she looked through me-- and she said, not at all maliciously, "I have a son just like you. He can't seem to get his act together either." And I thought, "Damn! Does it show? Is it so obvious?" My confusion must have been written all over me. So, this is one version of the fox's hole and naturally we want to get out. I was twenty-two then, but even thirty years later, you might still feel that you're down in that hole. You might say to yourself, "When am I finally going to accomplish something? When am I going to be at home in the world? When will I stop making these dumb mistakes?" And the koan, quite reassuringly, says that we can climb out: "If you truly penetrate in your practice and you become

aware of it, you will experience not a trace of obstruction.” No more screw ups. No more wrong place at the wrong time. Then you will be like a dragon sporting in the deep waters, like a tiger that commands its mountain fastness. I suppose that when I started Zen, I wanted to be something like that—a crouching tiger or hidden dragon. The koan makes us this promise: if we can some manage to let go of our illusions, even tiles and pebbles will become radiant with an interior light.

This particular koan is important because it’s about a person who has actually had dai kensho, a person who has had great awakening. But does the experience deliver on the promise that the koan makes?

If anybody tells you he’s a Buddha, please don’t believe him. I’ve read about a few Tibetan teachers who have gone around the world saying, “I’m coming back in my next life as the Buddha, the next Buddha after Shakyamuni.” Of course they all can’t come back as a Buddha. You can only have one Buddha in a world age, so some of these rinpoches are kidding themselves. I’ve also read of Zen Masters who say, “I am a Buddha and you are too.” Please do not believe those people! Buddhas are extremely rare.

If you practice Zen for twenty or thirty years, you might have had a great awakening experience at some point. About such people we say in Zen, “They have seen the Source face to face.” Because the experience is so wonderful, it’s easy for people to form the false view that awakening means being free from all future mistakes, all further confusion. But if we don’t make any more mistakes, how can we continue to exist at all?

In the koan Mayoku is a monk who has just had dai kensho, great awakening. And now that he’s had it, he’s headed off to see his friends, the monks he’s trained with years ago, hoping to share his joy with them, and maybe to crow a little too. He sets off on the journey with his pilgrim’s staff. In ancient India pilgrims sometimes traveled with a staff that was capped by trident. In Western tradition, the sea god Neptune holds a trident in his hand--something like a pitchfork with three prongs. This ancient symbol, shared by East and West, symbolizes harmony or perfection. I’m told that in India even to this day, pilgrims sometimes carry such a staff, which they associate with the god Shiva. In China the three prongs sometimes disappear, replaced by with three rings hanging from the top. And sometimes in Japan you will see three rows of little bells instead of rings.

Mayoku sets off to see his friends carrying this staff with the rings or bells attached. After a long journey he comes to Shokei’s temple, his staff jingling with every step. He walks around Shokei’s seat three times, shakes his staff—ring, ring, ring--strikes the wooden floor with the butt and stands up, spine erect. “I’ve done it! See, I’ve done it!” he says, not with words but with his whole body. And Shokei says, “Good! Good!”

Then Mayoku takes his staff and jingle, jingle, jingle, jingle, he walks right out of Shokei’s temple. He sets off across the countryside to see his next friend, Nansen, the teacher of Joshu. When Mayoku comes to Nansen’s place, he walks around Nansen’s seat three times, shakes his staff, ringing the bells, striking the butt against the floorboards and standing with spine erect . But Nansen says, “Wrong, wrong!” Mayoku is absolutely thunderstruck. “Huh?” Mayoku says. “How can that be? Shokei said, ‘Good.’ Why do you say ‘Wrong?’” To this Nansen replies, “Shokei says

‘Good’ to everything. That’s how he expresses his True Nature. You, however, are blown about by the wind. That will lead to destruction.”

Astonishing! What did Mayoku overlook? We train for twenty, even thirty years in order to have dai kensho and we believe that the day will finally arrive when all our problems will be over. How can you be clueless once you’ve seen the Source? How can you be out of harmony with things once the veil has been lifted?

Whenever I’m asked to name an enlightened teacher, I often think of the monk, Hsu Yun, Empty Cloud. Empty Cloud was probably the greatest Zen master in the last 500 years or more. Just as Buddhas are very rare, so too are people like Hsu Yun. He was a Zen practitioner of extraordinary depth. In his youth he wanted to become a member of the Bhikkhu sangha, the monks’ order. But his father, a government official, didn’t want him to do that. The father reasoned that if he entangled Hsu Yun in the toils of worldly life, the boy would never manage to get free, so he found two beautiful young women to marry his son. Of course, most people would have said, “My father’s wealthy. I have a nice house. I have two beautiful wives—not one but two. A nice car waits for me in the driveway, and I’ll have a comfortable career sitting at a big desk shuffling paper. Why fight it? I’ll go along.”

But Hsu Yun didn’t comply. He said to his wives, “Let’s just quietly wait until we have a chance and then I want to go to a monastery and be a monk.” And they said, “We like this idea too.” And they actually waited until Hsu Yun’s father died and then they all went off to do practice together in separate temples. All three took vows and became ordained, committing their lives to awakening. Can you imagine having that degree of confidence at such an early age? Hsu Yun was so attuned to his True Nature that even the weight of the whole society couldn’t make him betray himself.

Once he was free to join the sangha, Hsu Yun practiced for many years. You might expect that as a reward for being so dedicated, the powers of heaven would have given him dai kensho rather early in his life. Surely the person who went on to become the greatest Zen master for 500 years would have had Dai Kensho before his turned 30, a bit like those internet superstars who make a billion dollars five years out of college. But that wasn’t how events unfolded. Hsu Yun didn’t have dai kensho until he was in his mid fifties even though he had practiced whole heartedly from the time that he was eighteen years old. Talk about being true to your True Nature! Thirty years of waiting left him undeterred!

In his later life Hsu Yun could sit down on the cushion and not move for two and a half days, not move so much as a muscle. I can sit comfortably for three or four hours, and even longer if I’m on a roll. But Hsu Yun could sit for two and a half days without moving. Some people here in our Zen hall were having trouble this morning after sitting for just twenty minutes. That just goes to show you what a high peak Hsu Yun eventually became.

Hsu Yun also spent a lot of time up in the mountains practicing by himself. At one time he lived in an unheated stone hut which is still standing today. He wrote poetry about his stay there:

*Can joy be found in the mountains?  
Let me tell you. There's more joy in the mountains  
Than anywhere else.*

*Pines and bamboos perform sacred chants.  
The songs of Sheng flutes are played by birds.  
In the trees, monkeys climb for fruit.  
In the ponds, ducks cavort with lotus lilies.*

*This escape from the ordinary world  
Month by month and year by year  
Eliminates the hindrances to Enlightenment.*

When we imagine a great Zen master, we might think of someone who practices like this, solitary, hidden in the distant hills, his only companions the birds and the wind. In the Zen tradition there are many poems that celebrate this sort of life as the ideal. If such a person should come down from the mountains, we might think of him moving through the crowds and noise with an unshakable detachment, like a ghost. Such a person would seem to be totally free, totally disconnected. And Hsu Yun might appear to be an example of that freedom. But actually, for us to think this way is to make a serious mistake.

I'm sure that you already know that the Buddha spent time practicing by himself as a wandering mendicant who slept in graveyards and other deserted places. If you read the sutras carefully, however, you will see that he practiced with other people much of the time. Not only did he practice with other mendicants—other forest-dwelling rishis—but he practiced with two leading meditation teachers of the day, Arada Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra. Both offered him an opportunity to be their heirs and to carry on their teaching, but the Buddha was dissatisfied with the limits of their perspectives. And even when he left Udraka, Siddhartha continued to practice with a small group of fellow ascetics. It's true, in a certain sense, that when he woke up he was all by himself, but it was only a very brief time. And after his great awakening took place, the Buddha didn't live alone in the hills, but immediately returned to the world of men and women.

It's interesting that the Buddha called for the creation of the sangha. When he tried to teach his Path, he didn't just deliver instructions for solitary meditation. He also offered suggestions for the way people might conduct their lives as a community. The heart of the community that he recommended was to be composed of monks and nuns, men and women who were totally devoted to enlightenment and helping others wake up. The larger community would also include people in all walks of life.

It took me a long time—about thirty years—to appreciate the importance of community because I so often thought of practice as something you did all by yourself even when you sat with other people. And I often thought that enlightenment was a personal achievement. Enlightenment, I mistakenly believed, liberated you. Afterward, you could declare with joy, "I'm free at last!" "Free at last!"

But now I think of this as a false view because no such thing as an isolated self actually exists. And if no isolated self exists, it becomes very difficult to say where my mind begins and your mind ends, or where my karma starts and your karma stops. In fact, I now think that no such lines can be drawn. In other words, we're really living one great life. When you wash your back, you're also scrubbing mine. There's no such thing as an individual, and an awakened mind is not an attribute like

good looks or a high IQ. Awakened mind is a relationship, a relationship of a certain kind, and so indeed is suffering. If suffering is a relationship defined by being out of sync with the world, what kind of relationship does enlightenment involve?

When we do our zazen, we're trying to wake up—trying to get free from our own suffering. But the more you inspect your own suffering, the more that you see that it's entangled, hopelessly, with the life of everybody else. When I had that unhappy experience with my girlfriend long ago, I used to blame myself. But now when I think back on that period, it's impossible to say honestly who was really to blame. I had my faults. She had hers. We made each other quite unhappy. My parents didn't teach me how to have a good relationship with a person of the opposite sex. They didn't teach me how to be a good listener, patient and attentive. In fact, my parents also had a terrible relationship. So my own suffering goes a long way back, to my parents and their unhappiness. And that suffering had sources that go back as far as you care to probe—virtually beginningless. So, when you sit down on the cushion, many of your anxieties are not only yours. They are the work of many hands, and the fruit of many lives. The other day I came across an article about the problem of low self esteem in our society. Apparently, large numbers of Americans go to therapists and confess, "I feel like a total loser." And why is that? Why is this self-disparagement so consistently a problem? It's because the society sends people that message. If you're not Bill Gates, you're a total loser. If you make movies and you're not Spielberg, you've completely missed the boat. If the psychologists are to be believed, we get this message all the time from our society.

You might think, "Well, I don't need to worry about that. I'm an individual. It doesn't affect me." But actually we're interconnected much more profoundly than we realize. And so, when you sit down on the cushion, you're not just cleaning up your karma, you're cleaning up my karma too, and everybody else's. And when you experience enlightened mind, your enlightenment is mine as well, even if I never notice. I hope this is making some sense. It's a big mistake to imagine that we're in it for ourselves or can attain individual liberation. That is not all the Mahayana view. Enlightenment is a collective achievement. The Buddha could never have appeared on this earth without many, many lifetimes of effort on the part of countless people. In Buddhist tradition we believe that the Siddhartha Gautama was reincarnated many times before he became the Buddha. And as the *Diamond Sutra* tells us, in each of his previous lives he lived a flawless life of compassion and generosity to others. Finally, because of his extraordinary service to humankind, Siddhartha was reborn as the Buddha because he was at last capable of unconditional compassion.

You could understand this story as the literal truth, or you could say that it symbolizes the collective effort required to produce everything we value. All the great teachers of the Buddha made the Buddha possible, and the teachers of those teachers. All the people who cared for him and helped him to thrive gave him the courage to set off on his extraordinary quest. Even his enlightenment was not his own, and this is why the Buddha, after his awakening, created the sangha.

When beginners come here on Monday or a Friday night, one of the things I say to them is that when I first learned about zazen, I tried to do it on my own and I simply couldn't. You know the saying, "It takes a village..." Well, it takes a sangha too. Nothing in mainstream society teaches that enlightenment is a worthy goal. In fact, what we have been doing here today--sitting on the cushion for hours—can seem almost incomprehensible. Every once in a while some person will

say, “I hear that you teach Zen.” And I’ll say, “Yes.” And they’ll say, “How often do you meditate?” And I’ll say, “Oh, two or three hours a day, minimum.” And typically they’re incredulous. But if I said, “Well, I get online in the morning for two hours and I monitor my investments before going to work, they would think, “Now, he’s one smart cookie.” They’d say, “Oh, I want to know you! Can you help me make any money?”

Some people know I go to sesshins five weeks out of the year. And I’m sure that some of them think that’s absolutely crazy. But if I said, “I’m going to spend a month in Cancun,” that would be perfectly reasonable. The values of our culture, in other words, don’t support the pursuit of enlightenment. On occasions when I’m asked to speak as a guest-lecturer on Zen, I begin by asking the class, “What is the most important thing in our society?” And everybody knows the answer instantly. “Money,” they say, “money.”

Even though we call ourselves a democracy and think of society as a caring one, this country has been at war continuously ever since the day that I was born, and I’m confident it will be at war somewhere on the day I die. So the values of our culture are not at all healthy values. When people say, “I can’t seem to meditate on my own,” they treat this as a trivial insight. But it’s very, very important. It takes a sangha to wake up—a culture of awakening. I’m more indebted than I can say to my teachers, Genki Roshi and Webb Roshi, and to their teachers and their teachers’s teachers, and to a line of people reaching far into the past, people whose names I don’t even know. In their extraordinary generosity, all of them left something behind, created something that has helped me incalculably in my life. Everything we do as humans has this dimension, not just meditation.

It took a community to produce the Buddha, and the Buddha’s recognition of this truth led him to create the sangha. Basically he taught that the ideal condition for waking up is something like sesshin. And sesshin means waking up at 4:30. You have a bowl of rice for breakfast. You have a bowl of rice for lunch. You have a bowl of rice for dinner and a few other things along the way. And of course you sit, sit, sit, sit, sit. You don’t talk frivolously, and you shouldn’t read the paper. You shouldn’t twitter or go online. And once a day you visit your teacher and you say, “Here’s what I’ve accomplished.” At the end of the sesshin, you feel purified and full of compassion, deeply connected to the world. The Buddha said, “This is the best, the best way to live.” He said, “Those of you who want badly to wake up should live every day of your lives like this.” Fortunately, those of us who want to wake up, but are not ready for such a momentous step, can still achieve enlightenment up by going to sesshin fairly often.

One important detail of this koan is that after his enlightenment, Mayoku doesn’t go up on a mountaintop. Instead he goes to see his friends. First he finds Shokei, probably at a sesshin, and Shokai says, “Great! Wonderful! Bravo!” But then he goes to Nansen and Nansen says, “Wrong.” But what did Mayoku do that was so wrong?

You might need to sit for a very long time before you realize that Nansen’s remark might not have been aimed at Mayoku at all. Maybe it’s really aimed the world. Maybe what Nansen really means is this: “Look, Mayoku you think you’re done with your practice but you’re really just beginning. You have to bring your awakened mind into this crazy world.” When Mayoku first hears Nansen’s “Wrong” he feels guilty because he still thinks of enlightenment as something he has achieved by



and for himself. But instead of looking critically at himself, he needs to see with Mahayana eyes that we're all interconnected.

Perhaps Mayoku knows this already in a way. As I say, the first thing he does is to go to see his two best friends. There's something about his awakened mind that makes this choice seem natural and satisfying. But Nansen pushes him a little bit farther. Nansen says, "Don't stop with us. The whole world is your self."

To experience the world as self, and to see with your own eyes that self and world both arise out of emptiness, is to understand the relationship we call "enlightenment." But if this is true then the last thing we should expect to find is a world without problems. "Problem" is just our word for what emerges unpredictably from emptiness. Only by being a problem for us can the world come into view at all! Isn't that amazing?

The world becomes real—become alive—only when it first tells us "Wrong!" It took me more than thirty years to comprehend this. Only when we go smashing into the world, and blindly step back to say, "What was that?" can we bring it into our lives. A world without "Wrong" would be over and done, and that's not the living world.

Setcho announces this quite openly in his verse:

*This mistake, that mistake,  
Never take them away!  
In the four seas, the waves subside;  
A hundred rivers flow quietly to the sea.*

But Mayoku gets confused because he misunderstands enlightenment as something like perfection. And as long as you cling to perfection, your world will always be divided in two. Believe me, I've had to learn this the hard way. You'd think I would have caught on earlier!

Those of you who have done sesshin with us know what it's like practice at Murray Grove. On the first day of sesshin you can hear the cars driving down Route 9 about a hundred yards from the zendo. Also, in the summer motorcyclists seem to come by dozens. I think there must motorcycle rallies somewhere near Lanoka Harbor. So while we're sitting quietly on our cushions, men with leather jackets and Nazi helmets ride their hogs up and down Route 9, RRR-RRR-RRR-RRR-RRRRRRR! One the first day, the noise might really bother you. But around day three of the sesshin, if your mind is in the right place, the sound of the traffic becomes no different from the sound of birds or waves crashing into the shore. The perfection is there but only after the "Wrong." Or the put it another way, "Wrong" is perfection itself. Going from Wrong to perfection is active awakening, the awakened mind embracing everything, even when it's difficult to embrace.

This koan is such an important one: "With subconscious stirring, images appear. With awareness, ice forms. Even if there is no stirring and no awareness, you have still not escaped from the fox's hole." Do you understand what this last part means? Even if your mind is totally in mushin, you're still caught in the fox's hole. How can that be true? Because even mu is not enlightenment. The Buddha understood this very well. He learned emptiness from his two teachers, but he left them

because he understood that seeing emptiness was not complete awakening. You aren't free from the foxes hole until you embrace what comes out of emptiness.

But Engo, in true Zen style, doesn't say it plainly as I have here. In fact, he muddies the water so we'll have to figure it out for ourselves. Engo writes, "If you truly penetrate in your practice and become the master, you will experience not a trace of obstruction." Obstruction, though, is the price we have to pay first in order to get to the freedom he describes. What Engo wants us to discover for ourselves is that this desire for perfection stands between us and the relationship that enlightenment is. To be truly awakened is to become one with the imperfections of life, and that acceptance includes accepting yourself as the screw-up you really are.

The Western Christian tradition says, "Love others and eventually you'll be worthy of love." That's the Western solution to the problem of our shame at being imperfect. Love others and you'll be worthy of love. The Buddhist teaching is just the opposite. It says, "If you could just accept yourself for what you are...and that is the hardest thing in the world...if you could just accept yourself, you would love others effortlessly." It is our great shame about being the screw-ups that we are which prevents us from being awake. And when we're awake, we don't care about imperfection. We can just be fools, right? Fools. Empty headed fools!!

As soon as we try to be perfect, we fall into a deep hell, if may I say so from my own experience. The desire to be perfect is the opposite of awakening. It's what causes war. It's what causes endless suffering, jealousy, anger, etc. As I say, if you can accept the screw-up that you really are, you can love anybody and you will. Engo gives us a little hint about this. In effect, he says, "If you let go, if you'd stop trying to have a perfect life and be a perfect person, even tiles and pebbles would become illuminated." But if you hold fast, if you try to be perfect, if you try to be the enlightened one, even gold loses its luster.

Mayoku has had dai kensho and he's trying to be the Enlightened One. He's wandering around central China and the first friend he meets is Shokei. Shokei doesn't pass judgment on anybody because he knows, "I'm a hopeless screw up and I have already forgiven myself for that because I sit in this radiant compassion and I love even myself. I have disappointed my mother and my father. I have disappointed my wife or I have disappointed my husband. I'm a terrible son and a terrible husband, etc. And yet, I love myself because I sit in this radiant compassion and it's possible then to be very loveable to everyone else if you can forgive yourself."

Shokei is just sitting there in that radiance so comfortably that Mayoku could have come into the zendo and taken a crap right on the floor and Shokei would still have said, "Good!" It would have been OK, man. Then Mayoku goes to see Nansen, who is going to help him deepen his understanding. Nansen says to Shokei, "Listen, come off your high horse. You're trying to be perfect. Remember you're just a screw up. Don't forget that!" The amazing thing is that once we admit we're screw ups, once we admit we're hopeless, it becomes possible to be with others in the most relaxed way. It becomes possible to be totally relaxed.

And when you're relaxed, people are really quite wonderful to be around. If it takes a sangha to have enlightenment, enlightened awareness can transform the sangha into something like Dharma Paradise. How grateful we should be for others! Whatever I have found in Zen was given to me by

people whose names I don't even know, people who were able to overcome their fears and their attachments and accept who they were and made the world a much more beautiful place. What's good in my life wouldn't have existed without their efforts.

So we're all here today. I think what makes that so special is that we're practicing together. Please don't think, however, that by emphasizing our togetherness Zen is actually a cult. What's the difference between our group and a cult? In a cult everybody's trying to be perfect, and the teacher says, "I'm perfect." That's a cult, and everybody's in it headed for destruction, as the Nansen warns Shokei. But a sangha is like a mutual aid society. We're all trying to help each other wake up. We all have good motives for being here. We all want to be better people. We're all working on ourselves. But we know that perfection is impossible. That's a wonderful Path, don't you think? We know that none of us can be perfect. I'm not perfect. I make mistakes every day, and I'm not being modest. If you get to know me, you'll see that.

But watch out! It sometimes happens that when students get to know their teachers well, they become terribly upset because they realize these teachers aren't perfect. Yasutani Roshi, for example, was an accomplished Zen master. He wasn't Hsu Yun, but he was quite accomplished, and he used to carry a monk's bag with him, a bag that traditionally would have held his personal effects. But in his bag Yasutani would carry a package of marshmallows, which he loved. All day long he'd eat marshmallows, and eventually one of his students actually quit on him because Yasutani was too "attached."

As many of you know, John Daido Looi recently died of cancer. He was seventy three, something like that, and a chain smoker. He would take a break, go outside and smoke every chance he got. You could say, "Well then, he wasn't an enlightened person." But I don't agree. Maezumi Roshi, Daido's teacher, actually had a drinking problem. That's the truth--Maezumi used to stay with Webb Roshi sometimes, up in Malibu, so I know. Though incredibly gifted as a teacher of Zen, there's no two ways about it—Maezumi had a problem. And he had had his dai kensho many years before he joined AA. But people just don't understand that. They say, "He was not enlightened." To this I might say, "Yes, you're right. He wasn't enlightened. Nobody is enlightened in the way you imagine." When we try to be the Enlightened One, we set out on the road to hell because we isolate ourselves from others and the from world.

Just be natural. Just be natural—that's the spirit of Rinzai Zen. Of course, it's hard to be natural because in order to do so, I would have to like myself and I don't—isn't that the truth? But if we sit on the cushion and we do zazen long enough, we encounter this boundless compassion? You feel that incredible compassion and you finally say, "I think I'll be easier on myself. I'll even forgive myself for disappointing myself." After that, you could probably be friendly to anybody. So what if Maezumi Roshi had a drinking problem? Life is imperfect because perfection is just our idea about how things should be. Imperfection is really just a synonym for life. So if you hate imperfection, you'll commit suicide sooner or later because you will wind up hating life. So far as I understand the Buddha's way, it's all about embracing life unconditionally. And that means accepting the person sitting next to you, the one whose heavy breathing annoys you so much.

Generally speaking, what we most dislike about other people are the very qualities in ourselves that we have somehow concealed or repressed. That's why we get so upset—in a way we're really still

mad at ourselves. This is just another reason why your own awakening is tied up with everybody else's.

*This mistake, that mistake,  
Never take them away!*

*In the four seas the waves subside;  
A hundred rivers flow quietly to the sea.*

*"Mistakes" are the way the world presents itself to us. Mistakes are like a door into a larger world.*

*The twelve bells of the staff tinkled up high;  
Empty and silent is the road to the gate.*

Sounds nice, doesn't it? No problems at all. But wait, Setcho doesn't let the matter rest there:

*No, not empty and silent;  
The enlightened man must take medicine  
For the illness of "having no illness."*

The world itself is our medicine, and only the world has the power to cure us from the illusion that we are ill. Why don't we just all sit with that one.

Three bells.