

## 臘雪連天白

Rōsetsu ten ni tsuranatte shiroku

The year-end snows fill the skies with white

This phrase is from Hakuin's *Kaian Kokugo*.

When he was twenty-nine, Hakuin trained at Inryō-ji temple. Doing late-night zazen, he listened to the falling snow and became so deeply absorbed into its serenity that all he could perceive was a world of solid white, without a single detail. In this state of mind, all extraneous thoughts are gone, and no one remains to hear the sound of the snow. As the snow piles up higher and higher, we are one and the same with the scenery; our eyes and ears are completely purified, with nothing intruding. The swoosh swoosh of the falling snow has become a sound without sound.

We have to taste this flavor at least once, or we cannot speak about Zen. We must come to know this place where everything is extinguished, where even the idea of the possibility of a world is gone, where there is only white snow piling higher and higher. But if we remain in that world, without any thoughts, we will surely be stuck there our entire life.

“Coming out from behind the cloud, I am this winter moon. The wind stings my body; the snow is freezing cold.” These are the words of the monk-poet Myōe Shonin, describing the countryside near Kyoto. As he walks carefully back from the zendō on a snowy evening, the moon comes from behind the clouds, and he doesn't know if it is the moon that is protecting him on the snowy evening or if it is the moon walking down the path. A wolf cries, and it's okay, the moon is there too; its light is everywhere, the moon and his mind complete in oneness.

Where the world of nature and I are one mind—where the world and this warm love are melted into one—this is Zen.