

from The Book of Equanimity,
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CASE 19

Ummon's Mount Sumeru

PREFACE TO THE ASSEMBLY

I always admire the novel activity of Ummon. All his life he pulled out nails and wedges for people. Why did he sometimes open his gate and set out a tray of glue, or dig a pitfall in the middle of the road? Try to examine it and see.

MAIN CASE

Attention! A monk asked Ummon, "When not producing a single thought, is there any fault, or not?" Ummon said, "Mount Sumeru."

APPRECIATORY VERSE

Not raising a single thought—Mount Sumeru!
Ummon's Dharma giving is not meant to be stingy.
Come to accept it and you'll get a double handful.
Go doubt it and you'll never scale that thousand-yard height.
Blue oceans vast, white clouds at ease.
Between them there's not a hair's breadth.
A false cock's crow never deceives one,
be unsure and you'll not pass through the barrier.

In Sanskrit, *sumeru* means "wonderfully high," and Mount Sumeru is the center of the universe in Buddhist cosmology. It's the dwelling place of the gods. It is surrounded by seas and continents, and under it is the realm of hell, and above it is the realm of heaven.

The monk asked, "When not producing a single thought, is there any

fault, or not?" It reminds me of the joke: If a man is all alone in the woods without his wife, is he still wrong?

If you say, "I don't produce a single thought!" then the fault is right there. Ummon says, "Mount Sumeru." In the preface, it says he's always pulling out nails for people, and sometimes he puts a bowl of glue down for them to step into. It is said that Ummon always had a very pithy expression for any question.

In the Vimalakirti Sutra, when the Buddha was referring to an accomplished bodhisattva, he said, "Like Mount Sumeru, you are unmoved by honor or scorn. You love moral beings and immoral beings equally. Poised in equanimity, your mind is like the sky. Who would not honor such a precious jewel of a being?" Like Mount Sumeru, you are unmoved by honor or scorn, and you love moral and immoral beings equally. Like Mount Sumeru, not being moved by praise or criticism. How many of us can say that? Somehow, somebody praises you and you get a fat head. Is that Mount Sumeru? Somebody criticizes you and you get upset. Is that Mount Sumeru?

In a small village in Japan a young unmarried woman got pregnant. Her parents were enraged and she didn't want to incriminate her boyfriend, so she said, "That monk did it." That monk was the famous Master Hakuin. The parents went to him, and told him that he had to take care of the baby. He just said, "Is that so?" When the baby was born, he took care of it, and took the baby with him on begging rounds in order to get milk for the baby. Of course, everybody thought, "You dirty monk!" Eventually, he couldn't get anything. He had to go to other villages where his reputation hadn't preceded him. Finally the girl felt remorse, and admitted that it wasn't the monk. The parents went and apologized, and wanted the baby back. Hakuin said, "Is that so?" That's Mount Sumeru, unmoved by honor or scorn. We honor Master Hakuin now because of that!

Mount Sumeru is the universe. Even the ten thousand arms of Avalokiteshvara, the Great Compassionate One, cannot hold it. Wherever you look, whatever you see, whatever you feel, whatever you think: Mount Sumeru. So, when not producing a single thought, Mount Sumeru. Is there fault? Mount Sumeru. No fault? Mount Sumeru. And yet, you can't see through it. Why not? Because you are *IT*!

There's another Chinese monk in the seventh century who wrote a commentary on Mount Sumeru and its relation to bowing. He said, "Is this not

wonderful? Before, your body was just a speck on Mount Sumeru, and Mount Sumeru was the size of a dust mote in the Dharma realm. But when you reach the point of the true appearance which has no appearance, Mount Sumeru is contained within your Dharma body. You now contain Mount Sumeru. Is this not wonderful? You contain absolutely everything. Everything in the universe is contained within your nature, and you understand everything. The true mark of impartial bowing is an inconceivable state. You can reach this state when bowing to Buddha. Can you then explain all of its wonderful aspects? No. They are ineffable, indescribable."

If you really truly learn how to bow, then your body itself is Mount Sumeru. People who come to Buddhist practice in this country are not used to bowing, because bowing generally means "putting somebody above us." In a democracy, we don't do that. But there are examples of when Americans do bow. One is when people almost lose their life in an airplane that's disabled. When it finally lands, the first thing people do when they get on the ground is prostrate all the way down, put their head to the earth, and kiss it! It takes a near-death experience for Americans to naturally bow.

The Buddhist practice of bowing to the Buddha diminishes one's habits of self-importance, pride, and arrogance. It is a misconception though, to think that the worshipper is bowing to a statue of a Buddha, to a wooden, or stone, or clay image. The Buddha we bow to is the Buddha of our true minds. Mount Sumeru is bowing to Mount Sumeru.

The verse says, "Be unsure and you'll not pass through the barrier." Maezumi Roshi used to say, "I want you to be confident in yourself." That confidence is nothing but Mount Sumeru.

CASE 20

Jizo's "Not Knowing Is the Most Intimate"

PREFACE TO THE ASSEMBLY

A profound talk of entering the Principle derides the three and rends the four. The broad way of Choan runs seven vertically and eight horizontally. Suddenly opening your mouth to speak decisively, and lifting your foot to tread firmly, you should hang up your traveling bag and bowl and break your staff. Tell me: who is such a person?

MAIN CASE

Attention! Master Jizo asked Hogen, "Where have you come from?" "I pilgrimage aimlessly," replied Hogen. "What is the matter of your pilgrimage?" asked Jizo. "I don't know," replied Hogen. "Not knowing is the most intimate," remarked Jizo. At that, Hogen experienced great enlightenment.

APPRECIATORY VERSE

Right now, investigation replete, it's the same as before.
Utterly free from minute obstacles, one comes to not know.
Short's short, long's long. Cease pruning and grafting.
According with high, according with low, each is even and content.
A family's manner of abundance or thrift is used freely according
to circumstances.
Fields and lands excellent, sportive, one's feet go where they will.
The matter of thirty years' pilgrimage—
a clear transgression against one's pair of eyebrows.