

FOURTEENTH CASE

Yun Men's Appropriate Statement

CASE

A monk asked Yun Men, "What are the teachings of a whole lifetime?"¹

Yun Men said, "An appropriate statement."²

NOTES

1. Even up till now they're not finished with. The lecturer does not understand; he's in the cave of entangling complications.
2. An iron hammerhead with no handle-hole. A profuse outburst. A rat gnawing on raw ginger.

COMMENTARY

Members of the Ch'an family, if you want to know the meaning of Buddha-nature, you must observe times and seasons, causes and conditions. This is called the special transmission outside the (written) teachings, the sole transmission of the mind seal, directly pointing to the human mind for the perception of nature and realization of Buddhahood.

For forty-nine years old Shakyamuni stayed in the world; at three hundred and sixty assemblies he expounded the sudden and the gradual, the temporary and the true. These are what is called the teachings of a whole lifetime.^a The monk (in this case) picked this out to ask, "What are the teachings of a whole lifetime?" Why didn't Yun Men explain for him in full detail, but instead said to him, "An appropriate statement"?

As usual, within one sentence of Yun Men three sentences are bound to be present. These are called the sentence that encloses heaven and earth, the sentence that follows the waves, and the sentence that cuts off the myriad streams. He lets go and gathers up; he's naturally extraordinary, like cut-

ting nails or shearing through iron. He makes people unable to comprehend him or figure him out. The whole great treasure-house of the teachings just comes down to three words ("An appropriate statement"); there is no facet or aspect in which you can rationalize this.

People often misunderstand and say, "Buddha's preaching was appropriate to the conditions of one time." Or they say, "The multitude of appearances and myriad forms are all the impressions of a single truth,"^b and call this "an appropriate statement." Then there are those who say, "It's just talking about that one truth." What connection is there? Not only do they not understand, they also enter hell as fast as an arrow flies. They are far from knowing that the meaning of that man of old is not like this.

Therefore it is said, "Shattering one's bones and crushing one's body is still not sufficient recompense; when a single phrase is understood, you transcend ten billion." Undeniably extraordinary: "What are the teachings of a whole lifetime?" just boils down to his saying, "An appropriate statement." If you can grasp this immediately, then you can return home and sit in peace. If you can't get it, then listen humbly to the verdict:

VERSE

An appropriate statement;

***Leaping with life.*

The words are still in our ears.

*Undeniably unique and lofty.**

How utterly unique!

***The onlooker has some part in it.*

Why only stand like a mile high wall?

*Is there any such thing?**

He wedges a stake into the iron hammerhead with no hole.

***He misunderstands the words. Old Yun Men too is washing a lump of dirt in the mud; Hsueh Tou also is just pasting on ornaments.**

Under the Jambu Tree I'm laughing; ha, ha!

***This fellow has never been seen anywhere.*

*Only those on the same path would know.
How many people could there be who know!**

Last night the black dragon had his horn wrenched off:

***It's not just the black dragon who gets twisted
and broken. Has anyone seen? Do you have proof?
Dumb!**

Exceptional, exceptional—

***Ample praise; it takes Hsueh Tou to do this.
Where is he exceptional!**

The old man of Shao Yang got one horn.°

***Where is it? To whom is the other
horn given? Te Shan and Lin Chi too
must fall back three thousand miles.
Again, what about that other horn? I strike!**

COMMENTARY

"An appropriate statement; how utterly unique!" Hsueh Tou cannot praise him enough. These words of Yun Men are independent and free, unique and lofty, prior to light and after annihilation. They are like an overhanging cliff ten thousand fathoms high. Then, too, they are like a million man battle line; there is no place for you to get in. It's just that it's too solitary and perilous.

An Ancient said, "If you want to attain intimacy, don't use a question to ask a question; the question is in the answer and the answer is in the point of the question." Of course it's solitary and steep, but tell me, where is it that it's solitary and steep? No one on earth can do anything about it.

This monk (in the case) was also an adept, and that is why he could question like this. And Yun Men too answered this way, much like "wedging a stake into the iron hammerhead with no hole." Hsueh Tou employs literary language so artfully! "Under the Jambu Tree I'm laughing; ha, ha!" In the *Scripture on the Creation of the World* it says, "On the south side of Sumeru a crystal tree shines over the continent of Jambu, making all in between a clear blue color. This continent takes its name from this great tree; hence it is called Jambudvīpa. This tree is seven thousand leagues high; beneath it are the golden

mounds of the Jambu altar, which is twenty leagues high. Since gold is produced from beneath the tree, it is called the Jambu tree."

Thus Hsueh Tou says of himself that he is under the Jambu tree laughing out loud. But tell me, what is he laughing at? He's laughing at the black dragon who last night got his horn wrenched off. He's just looking up respectfully; he can only praise Yun Men. When Yun Men says, "An appropriate statement," what's it like? It's like breaking off one of the black dragon's horns. At this point, if there were no such thing, how could he have spoken as he did?

Hsueh Tou has finished his verse all at once, but he still has something to say at the very end: "Exceptional, exceptional—the old man of Shao Yang got one horn." Why doesn't Hsueh Tou say he got them both? How is it that he just got one horn? Tell me, where is the other horn?

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

- a. According to the analysis of Chih I, founder of the T'ien T'ai school of Chinese Buddhism, Buddha's teaching was divided into five periods: first, the period of the Hua Yen (Avatamsaka) scripture, where the Buddha directly expressed his own realization under the tree of enlightenment. Second, since no one at the time could understand the first, he expounded the Agamas for twelve years to suit elementary capacities. Third, he preached a transitional stage from this lesser to the greater vehicle, known as the extensive, or universally equal scriptures. Fourth, he preached the transcendence of wisdom. Fifth, he preached the Lotus of Truth (Saddharmapundarika) and Great Decease (Mahaparinirvana) scriptures. The teaching is divided by the Hua Yen school into the lesser vehicle, the elementary greater vehicle, the final greater vehicle, the sudden teaching, and the round, or complete teaching.
- b. This saying comes from the *Dhammapada*; Yun Men's reply can be read as 'teaching in reference to one.'
- c. The old man of Shao Yang is Yun Men. The horn is the stake driven into the holeless hammerhead. A hammerhead without a hole is an image used for something into which the 'handle' of logic and reason cannot be fit.