
KODO:
Solitary Angler

Look! Look!

What do you see when there is Nothing to see?

An ancient fisherman hooks a suburban housewife.

KOAN

One day as she was relaxing in her favorite chair, Kodo flipped through a book and came upon Ma Yuan's thirteenth-century Chinese painting titled *The Solitary Angler*. In the painting, a lone fisherman sits at the bow of a wooden boat in the middle of a vast lake, his fishing line dangling over the side of the boat.

Kodo cried out, "That's me! That's me as I truly am, but I am not yet that. How do I become *that*?"

REFLECTION

Who are you? My teacher, Maezumi Roshi, often instructed us to close the gap between who you think you are and who you truly

are. "Close the gap," he would say, "between the Self and yourself." The Self is unconditional, so how do you close the gap so that there is no sense of separation, no sense of *you* or *me*?

When Kodo saw Ma Yuan's painting, it cut through to her very essence. How is it that an African-American woman in New Jersey was called forth by a painting of an ancient Chinese fisherman? The essence of life, the original nature itself as captured by the artist Ma Yuan, resonated throughout her body. It didn't matter that the painting was of a different century, an unknown place, and an unfamiliar culture, nothing that resembled Kodo or her life.

What pierced through all the layers of time, place, and person?

What awakened in Kodo?

Ma Yuan's painting exudes stillness and silence, a sense of infinite vastness. A humble fisherman appears in this vastness; he is neither separate from it nor other than it. He is woven of the same nature as the fishing line, the water, the entire universe itself. Seeing this, Kodo felt a stirring deep within. She sensed immediately that there was something for her to uncover about her own being that Ma Yuan had captured. From this moment on, the urge to know *that* consumed Kodo's life.

What is this shift that Kodo experienced? Do you recall the moment when you felt the pull towards something beyond the conventional and material, beyond the division of *you* and *me*? It's a shift away from a self-centered way of living in which your ideas and desires form the basis for everything. Once you glimpse something beyond *you* and *me*, you can never be fully satisfied. The urge to affirm experientially the essential nature of life is a powerful force. This was Kodo's question: How could she experience herself *as-is*?

Who is searching for what? At the outset of the spiritual journey as depicted in *The Ten Oxherding Pictures*, a verse says, "Till now, the ox has never been lost."⁶³ The great Chinese ancestor Ma Tsu said, "That which asks the question is your treasure house. It contains absolutely everything you need and lacks nothing at all. It is there for you to use freely, so why this vain search for something outside of yourself?"⁶⁴ What is this vast treasure house that you are? The ancients say that it is beyond thinking. Ma Tsu says that it contains everything. What is it?

The *Heart Sutra* expounds this in the famous words: *Form is emptiness and emptiness is form*. How can you know the unconditioned, that which is fundamentally without dualisms like you and me, right and wrong, good and bad? Just as the painting awakened the treasure in Kodo, you, too, are called to know yourself at this deepest possible level. Zen masters say, "You don't sit in zazen in order to become a Buddha. You sit because you are a Buddha to begin with." Your treasure house is waiting to be uncovered, opened, and used freely. So, tell me, how will you know it?

I meditated for the first time many years ago in a seven-day Zen sesshin. During the sesshin, something awakened so powerfully inside that I just had to follow where it took me. At the time, I knew nothing about spiritual practice or realizing one's true nature, had never heard the phrase *Buddha recognizes Buddha, and Buddha calls to Buddha*, had in fact no words for my experience. I left my marriage, my work, and the city where I lived, and followed whatever that was that needed to know itself. When *Buddha calls to Buddha*, there is no stopping this powerful movement within. There is no right or wrong way to do this—you might remain at home as Kodo did, you might leave home as I did,

THE BOOK OF HOUSEHOLDER KOANS

or some combination of the two. Frankly, you just don't know where the urge to realize your true self will lead you.

A thirteenth-century Chinese fisherman called out to a contemporary African-American housewife; the Buddha's posture of crossed-legged sitting called out to me. What is calling you forth? Your essential nature is continually calling you home. Chances are if you are reading this, you are already responding to the call. When you return home to yourself, you realize that you have always been home, dwelling just as you are in *that* as *that*, the treasure house itself. The utterly unique being that you are is the perfect expression of *that*; the hands holding this book and eyes scanning the page are the perfect harmony of form and emptiness, complete and whole, lacking nothing, and cannot and need not be otherwise.

Show me yourself as the treasure house. When your treasure house opens, how will you use it? Where is Ma Yuan's fisherman now?