

CASE 18

Jōshū's Dog

By Yamada Kōun



Instruction:

If you push a gourd floating on the water's surface, it will turn over. The color of the jewel (shining) in the sun is indeterminate. You cannot grasp it with no-mind, you cannot know it with mind. The great person beyond measure is turned around in the words. On the other hand, are there any persons who can avoid it?

Case:

A monk asked Jōshū, "Has the dog Buddha nature, or not?"

Jōshū replied, "U." (He has).

The monk said, "Then how is it that he is thrust into that hairy bag?"

Jōshū said, "Because he committed himself intentionally."

Another time, a monk asked Jōshū, "Has the dog Buddha nature or not?"

Jōshū said, "Mu." (He has not).

The monk said, "All beings have the Buddha Nature. How is it that the dog has none?"

Jōshū said, "Because of his inherent karma."

Verse:

Dog Buddha-nature yes.

Dog Buddha-nature no.

The straight hook seeks fish that go against life from the start.

The cloud-and-water travelers pursue the spirit and seek the fragrance.

Noisy and boisterous, they talk away glibly.

He displays the goods as they are, without hiding anything.

Do not think it strange that in my house I am not careful (of my words) in the beginning.

Pointing out the blemishes, he steals away the jewel.

The King of Shin did not recognize Rin So-jō.

On the Instruction:

If you push a gourd floating on the water's surface, it will turn over. As you know, the first case of the *Gateless Gate* is Jōshū's Dog. That koan is actually a section of the longer exchange appearing here. The present koan is somewhat long and because of that, the meaning of the Buddha-nature of a dog may become clear, while at the same time remaining hard to see. As I will explain later in this teisho, the monk and Jōshū in this koan

are talking on two different levels or are in two different dimensions. But Jōshū descends a level to meet the monk on his own terms. He replies to what is inquired. And yet, although he has descended a level to meet the monk on his level, he still presents the essential world completely in his reply. Please examine this case with this in mind. Let's start now with the Instruction.

As you know, the Instruction is always written from the standpoint of examining the Main Case. Here, it is presenting the state of consciousness of Jōshū.

If you push a gourd floating on the water's surface, it will turn over. If you stroke a gourd floating on the water, it will turn around and around in the water. It is not fixed. This is referring to Jōshū's state of consciousness. He is completely free to turn this way or that, although it would be a mistake to conclude that he is doing so willfully. Instead, he has his sights carefully set on the other person when he says what he does. Here we have a case of "wave following upon wave," to use a Zen phrase. He is not stuck in a set pattern of responses. He views the other person carefully and gives appropriate instruction. There are many other phrases in the Zen tradition referring to the same thing. I've written a few down. Case 14 of the book entitled *Gekisetsuroku* (Record of the Accurate Tap) includes the following instruction by Zen Master Ganto:

Ganto instructed the assembly saying, "If someone has attained this, (which means someone who has attained complete enlightenment) he takes care of things in perfect ease, like pushing a gourd floating on the water's surface." This is the state of "that leisurely person of the Tao, who has exhausted all learning and has nothing left to do," to quote the first lines of the *Shōdōka*. This is the same as what is spoken of here in today's Instruction. It's like touching a gourd floating on the water.

Ganto continues: "If you touch it, it will turn around, and if you push it, it will move." The Japanese language includes the phrase *hyōtan-namazu* which means a person as noncommittal and slippery as an eel. But to repeat, we shouldn't assume that Jōshū is just talking recklessly and at random. He is giving most appropriate instruction completely suited to the time and occasion. One of the short critical comments in Case 38 of the *Blue Cliff Record* referring to Fuketsu runs as follows: "Fuketsu was all one whole mass of spirit, like a gourd floating on the water; press it down and it rolls over; push it and it moves. He knew how to explain the Dharma according to the situation." (Cleary)

The "situation" (ki in Japanese) means the other person. He preached the dharma according to the level of the person or persons listening to him. Thus it continues: "If it did not accord with the situation, it would just be false talk." If it does not agree with the state of consciousness of the other person, it would be of no use. On the other hand, if it is perfectly in agreement with the state of the other person, it is wonderful teaching. Let us proceed to the next line of today's Instruction.

The color of the jewel (shining) in the sun has no fixed form. If you look at a diamond in the sunlight, it emits many colors. When you look at it from one angle, it appears to be purple, and when you look at it from another angle, it appears to be reddish. It has no fixed form. You might ask if color has form in the first place. What the Instruction is saying is that there is no fixed or determinate color. This phrase has its origin in the *Nirvana Sutra*, which includes the following line:

"It is like placing a diamond in the sun: it has no fixed color." Engo's Instruction to today's case is stressing that, just like a diamond in the sun, it has no fixed color since the color is changing all the time. The *Nirvana Sutra* continues: "Diamond samadhi is like this." From the standpoint of practice toward enlightenment (jap, *shushōhen*), it might appear to be describing the state where you have truly become one with Mu. But this Diamond Samadhi is not limited to the aspect of practice toward enlightenment. From the standpoint of the essential world, it means having clearly realized the true fact as an unshakable certainty. That sutra continues: "Even in the midst of the crowd, its color is indeterminate, and thus is known as *diamond samadhi*."

“The crowd” means among normal practitioners of the way. The teacher has no fixed method of dealing with them. Instead, he or she gives appropriate instruction according to the level of the student. The Instruction for today’s case is referring to the same thing. That Instruction continues:

You cannot grasp it with no-mind, you cannot know it with mind. Even though you may have attained the state in which your mind is motionless without a single thought (jap, *munen-musō*), the state of consciousness we are talking about here will not appear.

And if you attempt to reason it out in your head, that will be of no use either.

The great person beyond measure is turned around in the words. This means an outstanding Zen person whose worth cannot be measured by ordinary standards. It means a person who has come to full and complete enlightenment. The Japanese statesman Saigō Takamori might not have been a monk, but he was nonetheless such a “great person without measure.” As the old Japanese saying goes, “if you strike the bell with a small hammer, you get a small sound, and if you strike it with a big hammer, you get a big sound.” There is no limit to the greatness of the sound that can be produced. This is what is meant here by a person without measure. “Turned around in the words” means turning the other person around with words, or pursuing him like his own shadow. As we see in the koan, Jōshū dogs the monk with his replies, leaving him at a loss for words. He says, “Because he committed himself intentionally.” Here’s an example of how you can’t pin Jōshū down. Some of you have no doubt worked on this koan already. Please reflect now on whether this koan is clear to you or not. To tell the truth, I myself was not completely clear on it at one point. Although in preparing to give a teisho, I am aware of how one responds in the dokusan room, I ask myself if that is really enough. We have to ask ourselves if we have truly grasped Jōshū’s state of consciousness. And then I’m not at all that certain. Although it might seem a strange thing to say on this occasion, to tell the truth, I woke up in the middle of the night and this phrase from the case popped into my head. I’m feeling now that it’s important to view these koan texts with a spirit of doubting inquiry, not contenting yourself with your present level of understanding. At all events, our understanding is not perfect and without fault, and what we have grasped still has lots of “dirt” attached to it. So it’s important not to leave things half-baked. I hope you will seriously grapple with each koan, not settling for a half-baked understanding. As the Instruction tells us, even a person beyond measure, even someone who has attained perfect enlightenment, can be dogged by the words.

On the other hand, are there any persons who can avoid it? In other words, is there anyone here who can avoid getting pulled around in the words, someone who won’t fail the test? This is said in way of presenting the Main Case.

On the Case:

A monk asked Jōshū, “Has the dog Buddha nature, or not?”

Jōshū replied, “U.” (He has). As you know, this is followed later in the koan by the famous reply of “Mu,” which appears as Case One of the *Gateless Gate*. When we practice with Mu as it appears in that case of the *Gateless Gate*, we hear that Mu (literally “not” or “not have”) has nothing to do with having and not having. We are told that it transcends having and not having. That is certainly true, but when we examine today’s case, it would appear that having and not having appear in comparison with or in opposition to each other. How shall we understand this? The Mu that appears in Case One of the *Gateless Gate* is given to realize, through the practice of Mu, the world of Mu, the world of not one thing. I often refer to that as emptiness. It is empty and thus one. The entire universe is one. To repeat, the koan Mu is given in order to realize and grasp that world. That is the world of not one thing. But, as we know:

*Where there is not a single thing there is the inexhaustible storehouse.
There are the flowers, there is the moon, and there is the tower.*

In other words, the phenomenal world is clearly revealed. That is the world of “U” or “having.” In this case, it means the entire universe, including Mu, perhaps. There is nothing except U (having). This is absolute U or having. However, because the monk asking the question is not aware of the absolute world, he is asking from the relative world of having and not having. This is what I meant when I said that he and Jōshū are in a different dimension or on a different level. There is not a single thing outside this “U”. Everything is “U” (having). The monk took this as meaning that a dog “has” Buddha-nature. He understood this as meaning that a dog already has this august thing called Buddha-nature. And this prompted his next question.

The monk said, “Then how is it that he is thrust into that hairy bag?” In other words, why is he in the form of a hairy dog, while having such an august thing as Buddha-nature? Why is he in that hairy bag of a dog body, sniffing and scratching?

In that case, the monk is obviously viewing this “have” (U) as something in contrast to “not having” (Mu). The monk’s question of whether a dog has Buddha-nature is based on a statement originally appearing in the *Brahmajala-sutra* (jap, Bonmōkyō), which says, “all sentient beings have Buddha-nature.” There are many statements attributed to Shakyamuni Buddha after his great enlightenment that have the same meaning. In the *Hua-yen Sutra*, also known as the *Flower Ornament Scripture* (jap, Kegon-kyō) the statement is: “All sentient beings are endowed with the wisdom and virtue of Tathagata.” The monk’s question is no doubt based on these statements. As just mentioned, the *Brahmajala-sutra* uses the word “have” (U) in saying that all sentient beings have Buddha-nature. There would seem to be a distinction between the dog and Buddha-nature, in that case. In reply to the monk’s question, Jōshū replies as follows:

Jōshū said, “Because he committed himself intentionally.” Here is the problem point. The question of “having” (U) and “not having” (Mu) is relatively easy to understand, I would imagine, since I’m always talking about this. On the one hand there is “having” or “being” (U).

Then the same monk, or perhaps another monk, asked the same question: “Has the dog Buddha nature or not?” This time Jōshū replied “Mu” (he has not). I just said that we are speaking here about an absolute “having” (U) and “not having” (Mu). But from the phenomenal point of view there are, after all, the concepts of “having” and “not having” in opposition to each other. The true fact grasped in Buddhism is nothing else than this. Seen from one standpoint, there is the entire phenomenal world. Seen from another, the content is empty. Since I am always talking about this matter, I imagine it is relatively easy for you to understand. For example, there is Case 6 of the *Blue Cliff Record* in which Fuketsu says, “If a single grain of dust is raised, the nation flourishes. If a single grain of dust is not raised, the nation perishes.”

If there is even the slightest idea of “having,” then the entire universe appears, the world of “having” (U) appears. However, if there is not a single concept, the entire universe disappears, leaving nothing. There is also the phrase “In the actual world, not a single speck of dust is raised.” Then comes the second part of the couplet: “In the gate of Buddha affairs, not a single thing is thrown away.” Buddhist affairs can be understood as the business of saving all beings. In the first line of the couplet, all things are denied. In the second line, all things are affirmed. The same holds for the couplet just cited above:

Where there is not a single thing there is the inexhaustible storehouse.

There are the flowers, there is the moon, there is the tower.

At the beginning of the *Genjō Kōan* (Actualizing the Fundamental Point) chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen Zenji says, “As all things are Buddha-dharma (which can be understood as within the gate of Buddha affairs), there is delusion and realization, practice, and birth and death, and there are buddhas and sentient beings.” In other words, there is the entire phenomenal world.

Then he continues:

“As the myriad things are without an abiding self, there is no delusion, no realization, no Buddha, no sentient being, no birth and death.”

“Without an abiding self” means there is no self. This is viewing things from the standpoint of the world of emptiness. In this sentence he is negating everything. That’s basically all there is to Buddhism. This is the only point where it differs slightly from other religions. You might refer to it as the “forte” or “specialty” of Buddhism, although the term might seem a bit strange. Recall Jōshū’s reply: “Because he committed himself intentionally.” The monk wanted to know why the dog, endowed with that “august” Buddha-nature, became an animal in that hairy bag, sniffing and yelping. And this was Jōshū’s reply. He is saying in effect: “That rascal did it intentionally.” To commit a crime knowingly has various repercussions. He says that the dog, because he somehow committed it intentionally became a dog. He is explaining things to the monk, as in the form of Buddhist doctrinal principles. But I’m wondering if there could ever be a case of a dog doing something while being aware that it would be a sin to do so! This seems a bit strange to me. Frankly speaking, when I read the Soliloquy (Dokugo) of Yasutani Roshi on this case, he also writes in that way. Such a notion does not go down well with me. The Roshi says that because there are still concepts lingering in the monk’s head, Jōshū, with his statement, “Because he committed himself intentionally” presents true Buddha-nature itself. As you will see in reading that passage in Yasutani Roshi’s book yourself, it fails to go down well when you read it. Wondering, then, how he treated the subject in his other commentary on the *Book of Serenity* (Zen no Shinzui: Shōyōroku), I had a look earlier today at that other book. Yasutani Roshi says that reading these words in the original word order of the Chinese gives another flavor to them. He says that we have here the workings of Buddha-nature itself. The real problem is how to handle this part of the koan. I would be happy if there were persons who said something like I just said when they come to dokusan. It’s something like the *dodoitsu* (a form of Japanese limerick) known to most Japanese: *All the while knowing that acting like that would end up like that, I acted like that and it ended up like that!* (*aa shite kou suriya kou naru mono to shiritsutsu aa shite kou natta*).

When I was practicing Zen at Engakuji Temple in North Kamakura, I once brought a limerick of my own making to dokusan in working on a koan, having been asked to come up with an appropriate capping phrase to the idea of “a single thought frame” (jap, *ichinen*). It was the first time I had ever composed such a thing. Not knowing what to say, I finally came up with the following: *Blow, you winds in the pines! Fly apart, you bamboo blinds! I want to see the one singing now to the samisen!* (*fukeyo matsukaze, hanareyo sudare, ima no kouta no nushi mitai*).

The Roshi burst out laughing and said I needn’t go to such lengths. I still remember what he then gave as an example:

The single thought of an ant reaches to heaven.

So bringing something of this sort would be all right, but don’t expect to pass the koan with that. Another way of expressing the spirit of the koan would be:

“He’s actually having a great time as a dog.” This would be closer to the overall spirit. Even closer would be the words themselves in Chinese reading order, just that sound: *chi-ni-ko-bon*. Just that. If you consider it to be the *workings* of Buddha-nature, as Yasutani Roshi says in his teisho, it’s still somewhat indirect and not so interesting. You must see it as *Buddha-nature itself*.

Another time, a monk asked Jōshū, “Has the dog Buddha nature or not?”

Jōshū said, “Mu.” (He has not). This is like the gourd on the water’s surface in the Instruction. Why does he react in this way? Because the monk is presenting him with concepts of “all sentient beings have Buddha-nature.” The monk was no doubt familiar with these passages in the sutras. Jōshū is stealing away the concept as found in the words from the sutra. This time he says “Mu” (not have). He trips up his opponent and throws him down on the mat, so to speak. The monk responds:

“All beings have the Buddha Nature. How is it that the dog has none?”

Jōshū said, “Because of his inherent karma.” There are other koans dealing with the nature of karmic consciousness.

I recall now first practicing Zen in what was then Manchuria (now part of northern China) under Kōno Sōkan Roshi and being given the koan Mu to practice with. I practiced as hard as I could, concentrating all my energy on that practice. At a certain point the Roshi told me that I should now leave off with that and bring to him a Mu of the nature of karmic consciousness, although I had not actually passed the first barrier at all. If one were to continue on that way, one would remain without a real Zen eye, even after passing through many koans. This is a fearful state of affairs.

How could we express Jōshū’s answer more easily? Why doesn’t he have Buddha-nature? “That’s because he’s an animal. That’s how things are.” The monk is still seeing karmic consciousness and Buddha nature as two separate entities. That’s why he doesn’t understand the real matter. It will not do to see karmic consciousness and Buddha-nature as two different things. At any rate, speaking in Buddhist terms we could say that if we use the words that all things are Buddha-nature, then all things are Buddha nature. If you still think that there is something remaining in opposition to that, you are still lost in delusive thoughts. It’s important to make this clear beyond a doubt. All is one. Although I am not familiar with Christianity, if we proceed with that logic, we would say that in Christianity all is God, that there is nothing in opposition to God. If you think that there is a hell or a devil in opposition to God, that is a major error and no true salvation is possible. Everything is Buddha-nature. Proceeding in that way, we have a common meeting place for religions. All the intellectual stuff along the way is of no use.

“Because of his inherent karma.” It’s a matter of presenting that as a fact. There are two matters that appear in this koan:

“Because he committed himself intentionally.”

“Because of his inherent karma.” The line in the Instruction, “the great person beyond measure turns it around in the syntax,” is talking about the same thing. It’s important to have a correct understanding and not get mixed up, so please take time to appreciate this koan. We turn now to the Verse.

On the Verse:

Dog Buddha-nature yes.

Dog Buddha-nature no. When you look at it from this side there is the back of the hand, and when you look at it from the other side there is the palm of the hand. But they are the single hand. Some people tend to cling to the side of “yes” or “having.” If they have a satori experience, they cling to the one side and are not free. That is why Yasutani Roshi often said that, before a satori experience, people are clinging to illusion and are not free. But if they have an experience, they tend to cling to that experience and are also not free. That is certainly the case. It is only when you have an experience and then completely wipe away any traces of an experience that true freedom appears. This first line of the verse is presenting these two aspects.

The straight hook seeks fish that go against life from the start. An ordinary fishhook is curved. But here we are talking about a straight fishhook. This has its source in an old Chinese story. In olden times King Wen went fishing one day. Evidently even the king in those days was free to go fishing when he wanted. He noticed a man a few feet away from him who was fishing with a straight hook and asked him what he was doing. The man answered with this line from today’s Verse: “The straight hook seeks fish that go against life from the start.”

Because fish that bite at an ordinary curved hook get caught because they are interested in the bait. I am fishing for fish that have no interest in life from the start, the man says. The replies of Jōshū in the koan are the direct presentation of the essential, and, thus, in

that sense “a straight hook.” With that straight hook he is fishing up those who have no desire for life. If you still want to hold onto your life it will be difficult for you to realize kensho. You must not fear for body and life. There is the Japanese saying: *mi wo sutete koso ukabu se mo are*, which literally means that only when you throw away your life will you be buoyed up by the stream. The English equivalent might be “nothing ventured, nothing gained.” If you are really going to do it, you should do it with the spirit that you would be willing to die. When I say that, some of you might have other doubts about whether you are able to do that, so I cannot speak much about the matter. At any rate, if you come to kensho, you will understand that you do not care for life and limb in that process.

There are the famous words of Confucius: “In the morning, hear the Way; in the evening, die content!” You will feel that it was worth your being born, even if you accomplish nothing else in life. This is what is meant by this line in the Verse about fish who do not care about life. It is normal to want to live. But here we are talking about those who are ready to die and who do not cling to life. The normal state of affairs is expressed in the next line:

The cloud-and-water travelers pursue the spirit and seek the fragrance. This means the persons who are content to smell the fragrance, like bees gathering around the flowers to drink the nectar. It would seem that such persons are all too numerous, persons who are interested more in an atmosphere of Zen than the real thing. They read Zen books or savor Zen poems, but don't engage in earnest practice. These are the persons pursuing the spirit and seeking the fragrance. When all is said and done, you must have an indomitable spirit of wanting to grasp the true matter. Otherwise, you end up simply sniffing the fragrance of Zen.

Noisy and boisterous, they talk away glibly. They just talk about things, without attempting to grasp the true matter.

He displays the goods as they are, without hiding anything. It's like the shopkeeper who displays all his wares for the customers. This is talking about Jōshū in the koan. He does not worry whether the others understand him. He says “no” or “yes” as the spirit moves him, without attempting to hide anything.

Do not think it strange that in my house I am not careful (of my words) in the beginning. This is also speaking about Jōshū. The verse says that he is lacking in prudence and discretion. Without thinking, he spills the beans and says everything, and then says “no” (Mu) as if to make up for his mistake. Why was he so indiscrete in the first place? But the verse says there's nothing strange in the whole affair. In both cases, he displays the whole goods, without holding back.

Pointing out the blemishes, he steals away the jewel. The blemishes or scratches in the jewel can be understood here as words, in this case, the words of Jōshū:

“Because he committed himself intentionally.”

“Because of his inherent karma.”

To point out those blemishes and steal away the jewel means to steal away the true self or essential world. If you stick to the blemishes of words, the essential world will get away from you.

The King of Shin did not recognize Rin So-jō. This line comes from an old Chinese tale, originally appearing in the *Book of History*, that I read during Chinese Classics class while attending middle school. During the reign of the First Emperor of the Shin Dynasty there was the kingdom of Chō, whose king possessed a most wonderful jewel. Shin was at that time the mightiest nation in China. King Shō of Shin heard about that wonderful jewel and said he would give the King of Chō fifteen cities in exchange for it. The retainer Rin So-jō, who must have been quite a fellow, received the order from the king and went to the King of Shin where he met him in an audience. Receiving the jewel, the king was overjoyed and gave it to his wives and concubines to look at. It appeared that he had completely forgotten his promise about the exchange for fifteen cities and was only interested in the jewel. Seeing this, Rin So-jō suddenly said that the jewel had a blemish and asked the king to give

the jewel back so that he could show the blemish. Receiving the jewel back, he suddenly took it and butted his head with it against a pillar, saying, “King E, whose vassal I am, entrusted this jewel with me, fasting for five days and performing purifications before giving it to me. But you show the jewel to these woman and show no sign of respect. If you are to kill me, then this jewel will also break against the pillar and die.” The King of Shin was startled and told Rin So-jō to stop, saying that he would also fast for five days and purify himself. That evening, Rin So-jō had one of his attendants dress up like a beggar and steal away with the jewel. Rin So-jō escaped himself that same night, having been able to obtain the jewel back again.

Rin So-jō told the king to give the jewel back to him because it had a blemish. This is referring to the various words in the koan spoken by Jōshū. They are all blemishes. The poet says that this steals away the real jewel. If you confine your attention to the blemishes (i.e., words), the real thing will get away from you.

The King of Shin did not recognize Rin So-jō. The King of Shin did not realize what Rin So-jō was up to. In this case Jōshū is compared with Rin So-jō. The King of Shin could be us Zen practitioners. In other words, so long as we get caught up in words we will miss the real thing.

I would like you to all realize the world of emptiness through Jōshū’s koan Mu.

There is the saying: Wishing to save all beings, I see that there are no sentient beings. Wishing to save sentient beings, I realize that there is no Buddha who wishes to save. When I meet people who say such things, I have my doubts whether they are truly familiar with the world of Mu. They might say that all sentient beings are intrinsically endowed with the wisdom and virtue of the Tathagata. They might say that all things are intrinsically Buddha and that there is no need to become Buddha beyond this. If you view things in this way, you are remaining in the realm of thought and do not really know the world of Mu. You must make efforts to make Mu as clear as possible so you do not fall into such mistaken thinking. Otherwise it cannot yet be called a true Zen enlightenment.