

Koans: Food for Thought Intuition

Read the following Zen *koans* two or three times. Choose one and answer or explain it.

A monk told Joshu: "I have just entered the monastery. Please teach me."

Joshu asked: "Have you eaten your rice porridge?"

The monk replied: "I have eaten."

Joshu said: "Then you had better wash your bowl."

At that moment the monk was enlightened.

A monk asked Tozan when he was weighing some flax: "What is Buddha?"

Tozan said: "This flax weighs three pounds."

Shogen asked: "Why does the enlightened man not stand on his feet and explain himself?" And he also said: "It is not necessary for speech to come from the tongue."

Goso said: "When a buffalo goes out of his enclosure to the edge of the abyss, his horns and his head and his hoofs all pass through, but why can't the tail also pass?"



Basho said to his disciple: “When you have a staff, I will give it to you. If you have no staff, I will take it away from you.”

Sekiso asked: “How can you proceed on from the top of a hundred-foot pole?” Another Zen teacher said: “One who sits on the top of a hundred-foot pole has attained a certain height but still is not handling Zen freely. He should proceed on from there and appear with his whole body in the ten parts of the world.”

Two monks were arguing about a flag. One said: “The flag is moving.”

The other said: “The wind is moving.”

The sixth patriarch happened to be passing by. He told them: “Not the wind, not the flag; mind is moving.”

A monk asked Fuketsu: “Without speaking, without silence, how can you express the truth?”

Fuketsu observed: “I always remember springtime in southern China. The birds sing among innumerable kinds of fragrant flowers.”

(The *koans* on this handout are from *The Gateless Gate*, by Ekai, called Mu-mon, translated by Nyogen Senzaki and Paul Reps [Los Angeles: J. Murray, 1934]).

