

10 THE WOMAN OF TAISHAN

INTRODUCTION

With gathering and with release, the pole is by his side; able to kill, able to give life, the balance is in his hands. Passions, demons, outsiders—all rely on his direction: the earth, mountains, and rivers all become playthings. But tell me, what sphere is this?

CASE

On the road to Taishan there lived a certain woman. Whenever a monk asked her, "Which way does the road to Taishan go?" the woman would say, "Right straight on." As soon as the monk would go, the woman would say, "A fine priest—he goes that way too." A monk told Zhaozhou about this; Zhaozhou said, "Wait till I check out that woman for you."

Zhaozhou also asked the woman the same question. The next day he went up in the hall and said, "I have checked out the woman for you."

COMMENTARY

The woman on the road to Taishan used to follow Wuzho out and in the temples (on the holy mountain Taishan) and had fully gotten into Manjusri's saying, "Before, three by three; behind, three by three." Whenever she was asked by a monk which way the road to Taishan went, she would point out the 'great road to the capital' right under the sun, saying, "Right straight ahead." This monk did not make an obstacle of doubt and went right off; the woman said, "A fine priest—he goes that way too." This woman too had a hook in her hand—how many intelligent freemen has she ensnared?

Since this monk couldn't cope with her, he related this to Zhaozhou, who said, "Wait till I check her out for you;" He slaughters everyone with doubt—the old fellow is aged but doesn't rest his mind; what is he planning?—he wants to determine the eye of the source.

Zhaozhou asked the same question and the woman answered in the same way. Some immediately talk about them as two parts, (saying that) the first time this monk was helping the woman, and that later the woman was helping Zhaozhou. Only Xuanjiao has said, "The preceding monk questioned and was answered in this way and later Zhaozhou also questioned and was answered in this way; but tell me, where was the examination?" I say, 'seen through.'

He also said, "She was not only seen through by Zhaozhou, she was also seen through by this monk." I say, not only has she gotten Xuanjiao involved, but me too.

Langya said, "Even the great Zhaozhou walked into the woman's hands and lost his life. Even so, many misunderstand." I say, don't judge others by yourself.

Muzhe of Daguishan said, "All the monks in the world only know to ask the way from the woman; they don't know the depth of the mud right under their feet. If not for old Zhaozhou, how could the heights of attainment of the sweating horses be revealed?" Even so, we need to borrow Tiantong's eulogy to do it: his verse says,

VERSE

***Old in years, attaining the essence, no mistake in transmission —
The Ancient Buddha Zhaozhou succeeded to Nanquan.
The dead tortoise loses its life due to designs drawn on it;
Even the steeds 'Chariot' and 'Wind-chaser' are encumbered by halter and bridle.
Having checked out the woman's Chan,
Told to people, it's not worth a cent.***

COMMENTARY

Ghosts and spirits attain their essence by weird powers. Spells and drugs form their essence of dependent powers. Divinities and dragons attain their essence by earned powers. Buddhas and Patriarchs attain their essence by the power of the Way. Nanquan and Zhaozhou were people beyond buddhas and patriarchs—how could they grow old? That is why it says, "Old in years, attaining the essence."

The enlightened master Zhaozhou succeeded to Nanquan. Mazu said, "The Scriptures are in Zhizang, meditation rests with Huaihai—only Nanquan is alone transcendent beyond things." Zhaozhou was a companion of Changsha; Nanquan was their teacher. Therefore his discerning examinations are not to be classified or characterized in terms of gain or loss, victory or defeat—everyone calls this the Pass of Zhaozhou; it is unavoidably difficult to get through.

However, Confucius had a saying, "A spirit turtle can manifest a dream in an accomplished sorceress, but can't avoid the entrapment of the rapacious net; its knowledge is capable of seventy-two auguries without making any wrong divinations, yet it cannot escape the calamity, of having its guts rent. Being so, that means its knowledge wears out at some point, there is an extent to which its spirit cannot reach."

Zhuangzi said, "The sorceress Song dreamed of a man covered with hair who said, 'I am from the depths of the sovereign road; I was the officer in charge of clearing the rivers for the lord of rivers; a fisherman got me along with his catch.' Later when she awoke she figured it out: it was a spirit turtle—it turned out that a fisherman had actually netted a white turtle, five feet around, along with his catch. The sorceress wanted to revive it; she divined on it and said, 'Killing the turtle augurs good fortune.' So she hollowed out the turtle and drilled auguring holes in it seventy-two times without any mistaken divinations." That's what Confucius was referring to.

Luopu said, "If you want to know the ever-transcending people, they do not stick the words of buddhas or patriarchs on their foreheads—that would be like a turtle bearing a design, by which it brings on itself the sign of losing life, like a phoenix ensnared in a golden net, heading for the sky—how can it hope to get there?"

King Mu of the Zhou dynasty had eight swift steeds, among which were two who mounted the clouds and galloped off, soaring beyond the birds in flight—therefore they were called 'Swift Four Horse Chariot' and 'Wind-chaser.' This part of the verse describes the woman being able to see through the monk and yet not avoiding Zhaozhou's examination. Although Zhaozhou can see through, still he doesn't avoid Langya's check. In intensive meditation this is called the law of gold and manure: if you don't understand, it's like gold; when you see through it, it's like manure. That is why it says, "Told to people, it's not worth a cent."

You just leave behind emotional calculations of gain and loss, victory and defeat, and you'll naturally always fool the woman and look down on Zhaozhou. But if you come to my door, don't point to yourself while carrying a board.

ADDED SAYINGS: CASE

A woman lived on the road to Taishan — A rabbit on the road between the neighboring city and the farmhouses.

Whenever a monk asked which way the road to Taishan went — Traveling for a whole lifetime, you don't even know where you're going. The woman would say, "right straight on."—This is not yet quite good-hearted.

As soon as the monk would go — having run into a thief without realizing it.

The woman would say, "A fine priest—he goes that way too." — You're already a swindler.

A monk told Zhaozhou about this — When people are even, they don't talk.

Zhaozhou said, "Wait till I check her out for you." — When water is level it doesn't flow.

Zhaozhou also asked the woman the same question — A trap to fell a tiger.

The next day he said, "I've checked out that woman for you." — I'm an even bigger swindler.

ADDED SAYINGS: VERSE

Old in years, attaining the essence, no mistake in transmission — Just don't bedevil people's sons and daughters.

The Ancient Buddha Zhaozhou succeeded to Nanquan — Zhen province truly produces big turnips.

The dead tortoise loses its life due to designs drawn on it — Subtle ghosts and spirits are after all caught in the net.

Even the steeds 'Chariot' and 'Wind-chaser' are encumbered by halter and bridle — Even 'Running Wind' and 'Galloping Rain' cannot avoid the halter.

Having checked out the woman's Chan — How many men are manly?

Told to people, it's not worth a cent — Obviously the faculties are not those of a sage.