ZEN POEMS
Read by Lucien Stryk

ENLIGHTENMENT POEMS OF THE CHINESE ZEN MASTERS
DEATH POEMS OF THE CHINESE ZEN MASTERS
POEMS OF THE JAPANESE ZEN MASTERS
SHINKICHI TAKAHASHI - CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE MASTER
ZEN POEMS OF LUCIEN STRYK

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Lucien Stryk's most recent of eight books of poems are Selected Poems (1976), The Duckpond (1978) and Zen Poems (1979). His poems and essays have appeared in numerous anthologies and periodicals, he has received awards, including the Governor's Award for the Arts (Illinois), and has held a National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship and, to translate Zen poetry, a National Translation Center Grant. He is editor of World of the Buddha, the anthologies Heartland: Poets of the Midwest (I and II), and translator, with Professor Takashi Ikemoto of Japan, of among other volumes, Afterimages: Zen Poems of Shinkichi Takahashi, Zen Poems of China and Japan: The Crane's Bill and The Penguin Book of Zen Poetry. He has given poetry readings and lectured throughout the United States and England, has held a Fulbright Lectureship in Iran and a Fulbright Travel/Research Grant and two visiting lectureship in Japan. He teaches Oriental literature and poetry at Northern Illinois University.
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INTRODUCTION

I

The Golden Age of China, T'ang through Sung dynasties (A.D. 618-1279), began not long after the Western Roman Empire came to an end and lasted well beyond the First Crusade. One of the most cultivated eras in the history of man, its philosophical and social ground had been prepared centuries before Christianity, and men perfected their lives and arts certain that they gave meaning to something higher than themselves. To artists of the time, numerous and skilled, poetry and painting were Ways - two among many, to be sure, but glorious Ways - to realization of Truth, whose unfolding made possible not only fulfilled life but also acceptance of its limitations. They saw in the world a process of becoming, yet each of its particulars, at any moment of existence, partook of the absolute. This means that no distinction was drawn between the details of a landscape - cliffs, slopes, estuaries, waterfalls - shaped by the artist's emotions. Foreground, background, each was part of the process, a metaphor in painting, the spirit discovering itself among the things of this world.

On the rocky slope, blossoming Plum - from where?
Once to saw them, Reivan
Danced all the way to Sandan.

HOIN

The artist's visions were held to be revelatory; painting, poem meant to put men in touch with the absolute. Judgement of art works was made principally with that in mind. Some might delight the senses, a few exalt the spirit, whose role was taken for granted to be paramount, the greatest artists respecting its capacity to discover itself anew in their works. Over centuries the West has deduced the guiding aesthetic principle of such art to be 'Less is More', and a number of stories bear this out.

One concerns a painting competition in the late T'ang dynasty, a time of many such events and gifted competitors, all of whom, brought up in an intellectual and artistic meritocracy, were aware of what success might mean. Judged by master painters, most carefully arranged, each had its theme, that of our story being 'Famous Monastery in the Mountains'. Ample time was provided for the participants to meditate before taking up brushes. More than a thousand entrys of monasteries in sunlight, in shadow, under trees, at mountain-foot, on slopes, at the very peak, by water, among rocks - all seasons. Mountains of many sizes, shapes, richly various as the topography itself. Since the monastery was noted 'famous', monks abounded, working, praying, all ages and conditions. The competition produced works destined to be admired for centuries to come. The winning painting had no monastery at all; a monk paused, reflecting, on a misty mountain bridge. Nothing - everything - more. Evoking atmosphere, the monk knew his monastery hovered in the mist, more beautiful than hard could realize. To define, the artist must have learnt from the Taoism of Lao Tzu or the Zen of Hui-neng, to limit.

II

Zen began its rapid growth in early T'ang China, a product of the merging of the recently introduced Buddhism of the Indian monk Bodhidharma, who reached China in 520, and Taoism, the reigning philosophy of poets and painters for some thousand years. Providing a rigorous, inspiring discipline, insisting on the purity of meditation, its temples and monasteries were havens for seekers after truth throughout the T'ang, Sung and Mongol-shadowed Yuan dynasties. Zen masters, religious guides, often themselves poets and painters, made judgements concerning the spiritual attainments of artist-disciples on the basis of works produced. Neither before nor since has art had so important a role in community life, and there are countless instances of poems or paintings affecting the development of the philosophy itself. One such concerns the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng, who was named as Hung-jen's successor chiefly on the strength of his famous enlightenment poem:

The tree of Perfect Wisdom
Was originally no tree,
Nor has the bright mirror
Any frame. Buddha-nature
Forever clear and pure,
Where is there any dust?

Writers of such poems did not think themselves poets. Rather they were gifted men - masters, monks, some laymen - who after momentous experiences found themselves with something to say which only a poem could express. Enlightenment, point of their meditation, brought about transformation of the spirit; a poem was expected to convey the essential experience and its effect. Such an awakening might take years of unremitting effort, to most it would never come at all.

One day Hsao, disciple of Hii, the Chinese master, was asked by the master why he spent so much time meditating. Hsao: 'To become a Buddha.'

The master lifted a brick and began rubbing it very hard. It was now Hsao's turn to ask a question: 'Why,' he asked, 'do you rub that brick?'

'To make a mirror.'

'But surely,' protested Hsao, 'no amount of polishing will change a brick into a mirror.'

'Just so,' the master said: 'no amount of cross-legged sitting will make you into a Buddha.'

Yet masters did their best to guide disciples: one device was the koan (problem for meditation), which they were asked to solve. As no solution was possible, the mediator was always at wits' end - the intention. One of the koans, usually first given, was Jotshu's 'Oak in the courtyard', based on the master's answer to the standard Zen question: 'What's the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming to China?' These awakening poems, responses to this question of the masters, suggest the range of possibilities:

Jotshu's 'Oak in the courtyard' -
Noth's grasped its roots.
Turned from sweet plum trees,
They pick sour pears on the hill.

Jotshu's 'Oak in the courtyard'

Handed down, yet lost in leafy branch
They miss the root, Disciple Haku shouts -
Jotshu never said a thing!"
Given their importance, it is not surprising to find in early Chinese enlightenment poems frequent references to dōsa. Most poems, though, deal with major aims of the philosophy, escape from space-time bondage, for example, a hard-iron precondition of awakening:

Twenty years a pilgrim,
Foeing east, west.
Back in Seikin,
I've not moved an inch.

Seiken-Chiju

Earth, river, mountain:
Snowflakes melt in air.
How could I have doubted?
Where's north? south? east? west?

Dagai

Many express swift release from conventional attachments:

Searching Him too
My strength.
One night I tent
My pointing finger—
Never such a moon.

Reppu

Need for such release, transcending of doctrine (finger pointing at the moon, never taken for the moon itself!), was the theme of Bodhidharma's historical interview with Emperor Wu of Liang, shortly after his arrival in China (by then some schools of Buddhism had been established there a few hundred years).

Emperor Wu: From the beginning of my reign, I have built many temples, had numerous sacred books copied, and supported all the monks and nuns. What merit have I?

Bodhidharma: None.

Emperor Wu: Why?

Bodhidharma: All these are inferior deeds, showing traces of worldliness, but shadows. A truly meritorious deed is free of wisdom, but mysterious, its real nature beyond grasp of human intelligence — something not found in worldly achievement.

Emperor Wu: What is the first principle of your doctrine?

Bodhidharma: Vast emptiness, nothing holy.

Emperor Wu: Who, then, stands before me?

Bodhidharma: I don't know.

Not long after this Bodhidharma wrote his famous poem:

Transmission outside doctrine,
No dependencies on words.
Pointing directly at the mind,
Thus seeing oneself truly.
Attaining Buddhahood.

As might be expected, awakening poems were held precious in Zen communities, serving for generations as icons themselves or as subjects for nama (sermons). Interpretation was often made in the light of the master's life, what led to his experience. Nan-no-Myo, awakened when asked by his master to interpret 'Not falling into the law of causation, yet not ignoring it', wrote:

Not falling, not ignoring—
A pair of mandarin ducks
Alighting, hobbling, anywhere.

Every utterance of a worthy master was thought significant. The late samurai master Tendo-Myo, an example, guided Japan's great Dogen (1200-1253) to enlightenment, which alone made his death poem, simple as it is, glorious to the Japanese:

Sixty-six years
Piling sins,
I leap into hell—
Above life and death.

Zen death poems, remarkable in world literature, have a very ancient tradition. On their origin one can only speculate, but probably in early communities masters felt responsibility to disciples beyond the grave, and made such poems in the hope that they would help point the way to attainment, not only for disciples but for posterity. To some the final poem was not felt to be itself of much importance:

Life's as we
Find it — death too.
A paring poem?
Why insist?

Dai-Soko

Many, however, considered it to be a symbolic summation, quite possibly preparing well before the inevitable moment. It would stand, every syllable pondered, and lives might well be affected by truth, absolute, whatever its message and worth as 'poetry.' Different degrees between death poems give a sense of the variety of temperament among Chinese masters:

Seventy-six: done
Wok a-life.
I've not sought heaven,
Don't fear hell.
I'll lay these bones
Beyond the Triple World—
Unembattled, unperturbed.

Kokoro's sense of release from a harsh existence:

The word at last,
No more dependencies.
Cold moon in pond,
Smoke over the ferry.

Shounto's astringent mockery:

'No mind, no Buddha;
And no heaven;
'Got skin, got marrow.'
Well, goodbye to that.
Beyond, peak glows on peak?

There is no way of telling, records being scant and unreliable (there are wills, births of birth and death dates), whether all wrote death poems, but given their solemn purpose they probably did. By 1240, when China was overrun by Mongols, Zen had flourished for almost one hundred years in Japan. There from the start death poems of masters were thought to have great religious meaning. Dogen left, exulting:

Four and fifty years
I've hung the sky with stars.
What joy, what joy—
What scattering!

III

Centuries before the introduction of Zen in the Kamakura Period (1192-1333), Japan had been virtually transformed by Chinese Buddhism. Every aspect of life, from the Nara Period (710-84) on, reflected in one way or another the Chinese world vision. Painters and poets looked to China constantly, as did the greatest painter in the Chinese style, Sesshū, who crossed there for instruction and inspiration. Not all became Zenmitsu like Sesshū, who was to join the priesthood, but most were guided by the philosophy, their works revealing the extent. In the earliest Zen communities enlightenment and death poems were written strictly in kūshi (Chinese characters), in classical verse forms preferred by the Chinese masters — there is little to distinguish poems of the first Japanese Zenmitsus from those written in China centuries before.

Here is the master Daito's enlightenment poem, written when he had succeeded in solving the eighth koan of the Chinese Zen text Hekigotokoro, which contains a reference to 'Umarro's barrier':

At last I've broken Umarro's barrier;
There's sea everywhere — east, west, north, south.
In the morning, out at evening; neither host nor guest.
My every step stirs up a little breeze.

And here is Fumon's death poem:

Magnificent! Magnificent!
No one knows the final word.
The tower's eight o'clocks,
Out of the void leap wooden lambs.

The Japanese masters composed not only enlightenment and death poems in Chinese verse forms, they often wrote of important events in the history of Zen, like Bodhidharma's interview with the Emperor Wu. Here is Shun-ku's poem on the subject. ('Shōron' is the temple where Bodhidharma, on discovering that the emperor lacked insight, sat in Zen for nine years. To reach the temple he had to cross the Yangtze River.)

After the spring song, 'Vast emptiness, no holiness';
Comes the song of wind-wind along the Yangtze River.
Last at night I too play the restless flute of Shōron,
Piercing the mountains with its sound, the river.

Even in writing on general themes associated with Zen life the masters employed the purest literary Chinese. Since only a few Japanese knew the language, this practice made the Zen poems elusive, leading to the feeling on the part of masters like Dogen that an indigenous form, tanka (or waka), should be utilized. Such works would be understood in and out of the Zen communities, and surely it was possible to be as inspiring in Japanese, which, though using kanji, had a syllabary and was very different from Chinese. The most important collection of early Japanese poetry, the Manyoku (eighth century), contains three kinds of verse forms: choka, tanka and isogaki, all based on arrangements of 5-7-5 syllable lines, the most popular, tanka, structured as 5-7-5-7-7 syllables — strictly, without any possible variation.

In the Heian Period (794-1184), which immediately preceded the first age of Zen, tanka was the favourite verse form at the courts. Towards the end of Heian, renga (linked verse), became popular: a chain of alternating 14 and 21 syllables independently composed but associated with the verses coming before and after. By the fifteenth century, renga expiring of artificiality, something more vital was found, the kikai renga, linked verses of 17 syllables. Later came individual poems of 17 syllables, kikoku, the earliest authentic examples by writers like Sogi (1241-1303), Sokan (1418-1445) and Moritake (1421-1498).

Bashō, thought by many Japanese to be their finest kikoku writer and greatest poet, lived from 1644 to 1694. Like almost all noted kikoku writers he was a Zenmit, practicing discourse under the master Busho, with whom, according to Dr T. Suzuki, he had the following exchange:

Bucho: How are you getting along these days?
Basho: Since the recent rain moss is greener than ever.
Bucho: What Buddhism was there before the moss became green?

Resulting in enlightenment and the first of his best-known kikoku:

Basho: Leap-splash — a frog.

Whether or not they undertook discipline, kikoku writers thought themselves living in the spirit of Zen, their truest poems expressing its ideals. To art lovers the appeal of kikoku is not unlike that of a nambu (ink-wash) scroll by Sesshū, and many kikoku poets, like Bunzo, were also outstanding painters.

Zenmitsus have always associated the two arts: 'When a feeling reaches its highest pitch,' says Dr Suzuki, Zen's most distinguished historian, 'we remain silent, even 17 syllables may be too many. Japanese artists . . . influenced by the way of Zen tend to use the fewest words or strokes of brush to express their feelings. When they are too fully expressed no room for suggestion is possible, and suggestibility is the secret of the Japanese arts.' Like a painting or rock garden, kikoku is an object of meditation, drawing back the curtain on essential truth. It shares with other arts qualities belonging to the Zen aesthetic — simplicity, naturalness, directness, profundity — and each poem has its dominant mood: kai (isolation), wa (harmony), aware (impermanence) or yugen (mystery).

If it is true that the act of poetry consists in saying important things with the fewest possible words, then kikoku has a just place in world literature. The limitation of syllables assures terseness and concision, and the range of association in the finest examples is at times astonishing. It has the added advantage of being accessible: a seasonal reference, direct or indirect, simplest words, chiefly names of things in dynamic relationships, familiar themes, make it understandable to most, on one level at least. The kikoku lives most fully in nature, of great meaning to a people who never feel it to be outside themselves. Man is fulfilled only when unseparated from his surroundings, however hostile they may appear:

To the willow —
all barren, and desire
of your heart.

Basho
In the West, perhaps as a result of fascination with the haiku (its association with the development of modern poetry at one extreme, its universal appeal in schools at the other), it arouses as much suspicion as admiration. It looks so easy, something anyone can do. A most unfortunate view, for haiku is a quintessential form, much like the sonnet in Elizabethan England, being precisely suited to (as it is the product of) Japanese sensibility, conditioned by Zen. For Basho, Buson, Issa, haiku permitted the widest possible field of discovery and experimentalism.

The Zen experience is central to the artist's contemplation of subject sometimes referred to as 'mind-poising'. The disciple in an early stage of discipline is asked to point the mind at (meditate upon) an object, say a bowl of water. At first he is quite naturally inclined to metaphorize, expand, rise imaginatively from water to lake, sea, clouds, rain. Natural perhaps, but just the kind of 'mentalization'.

Zen masters caution against. The disciple is instructed to continue until it is possible to remain strictly with the object, penetrating more deeply, no longer looking at it but, as the Sixth Patriarch HuShen maintained essential, as it. Only then will he attain the state of muga, so close an identification with object that the unstable mentalizing self disappears. The profoundest haiku give a very strong sense of the process:

Dew of the bramble, sharp white.

BUSON

Arid fields, the only life - necks of cranes.

SHIKO

To give an idea of the way haiku work, without making an odious cultural comparison, here is Ezra Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro', perhaps the most admired (and for good reason) haiku-like poem in English:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

A simile, the poem startling as haiku often do, but much of what is said would, to a haiku poet, be implied. Incorporating the title (haiku are never titled), he might make the poem read:

Faces on the metro - petals
on a wet black bough.

If asked why, he might answer: the first few words, 'The apparition of these', though sonorous enough, add nothing. Nor does the reference to 'crowd', 'metro' stations usually being crowded - besides, the 'petals' of the simile would make that clear. His revision, he might claim, transforms the piece into an acceptable haiku, one rather like, perhaps less effective than, Onitsura's:

Autumn wind -
across the fields, faces.

Without using simile, Onitsura stuns with an immediacy of vision - those faces whipped by a cold wind.

For centuries haiku has been extremely popular, and there are established schools with widely differing views. Typical is the Tenryu, truly traditional, working with the 5-7-5 syllabic pattern, clear seasonal references, and possessing a creed - Shitetsu, on-the-spot composition with the subject 'traced to its origin'. There are around two thousand members all over Japan, and it is usual for groups to meet at a designated spot, often a Zen temple, and write as many as one hundred haiku in a night, perhaps only one of which, after months of selection and revision, will be adequate. It will then be sent to one of the school's masters and considered for the annual anthology, representing poems of some thirty members.

Typical by comparison is the Soen (free-verse) school, which feels no obligation to stick to the 17-syllable pattern. Short and compact, however, its poems are written in the 'spirit of Basho'. Their creed is more general - Sigalovance - and is very close to Zen, many of the members involved in discipline. They follow an ancient dictum, Zenkei ichimi (Poetry and Zen are one), and Kado, the Way of Poetry. As they strive for the revelatory, fewer poems are written than in the Tenryu. Both schools, while opposed in principle, relate to Zen, as do all other schools. Yet very few contemporary haiku could have pleased Basho, for however lofty the ideals they are generally derivative.

Kado, the Way of poetry to self-discovery, is similar in aim to other do (ways) of Zen: Gado (painting), Shodo (calligraphy), Jindo (philosophy), Judo (martial). Haiku teachers and Zen masters expect no miracles of disciples, yet maintain that with serious practice of an art, given aspirations, men perfect themselves: farmers, professors make their haiku, most egalitarian of arts. To those who find art a mystery engaged in by the chosen, the sight of a haiku-school group circling an autumn bush, lined notebooks, pens in hand, can be sharply touching. Only a cynic would think otherwise.

The few of course achieve true distinction in the skill, and are known to all who care for poetry. Usually they echo early masters, but some find that language cramping and consciously introduce the modern - factories, tractors, automobiles. They will admit, without derogating, to taking little pleasure from old haiku. They are however generous readers of each other's work and that of certain contemporary poets in whom many are interested, despite his not being a writer of haiku, is Shinkichi Takanashi, regarded throughout Japan as the greatest living Zen poet.

IV

Overlooking the sea in a fishing village on Shikoku Island, a poem is carved on a stone:

ABSENCE
Just say, 'He's out' -
back in five billion years!

It is Shinkichi Takanashi's voice we hear. He was born in 1901, and the commemorative stone, placed by his townsmen, is one of many honours accorded him in recent years: another is the Ministry of Education's prestigious Prize for Art, awarded for Collected Poems (1973). In Japan poets are often honoured in this way, but rarely one as archaical as Takanashi. He began as a Dadaist, publishing the novel Dada in 1924, and defied convention thereafter. Locked up in his early life a few times for 'impulsive actions', when his newly printed Dadaist Shinkichi's poetry was handed to him through the bars of a police cell, he tore it into shreds.

In 1928 Takanashi began serious Zen study under the master Shizan Azukigata at the Shogenji Rinza Temple, known for severity of discipline. He trained for seventeen long years, doing zazen (formal sitting in meditation) and studying koans - on which he wrote numerous poems. He attained enlightenment (satori), the first time on reaching the age of forty. In 1953, when fifty-two, he was given Daito (his awakening testified to) by Shizan, one of six or seven discipies so honoured. In addition to some fiction and much poetry, he has written books on Zen highly regarded by Zenists, among them Shike, Noen, Shosano, Dogen, Lien and Shikan (1953), Esoteric Buddhism and the Zen Masters (1967).

Takanashi has interested fellow-poets and critics, East and West. A Japanese poet writes:

Takanashi's poetry is piquancy itself, just as Zen, the quintessence of Buddhism, bawls out by means of its concise vocabulary a sort of pictant ontology... Where does this enlarged feature come from? It comes from his strange disposition which enables him to sense the homogeneity of all things, including human beings. It is further due to his own method of versification: he clashes his idea of timelessness against the temporality of all phenomena to cause a fissure, through which he lets us see personally and convincingly the reality of limitless space.
of its own. For when one is absent the other is put out of existence. It is so with all things in this world, they are all empty, without self, without absolute existence. They are like the will-o'-the-wisp.

For one who believes in the interpenetration of all living things, the world is a body, and if he is a poet like Taka-
hashi, troubled by what the unenlightened inflict upon one another, he will write:

\[\text{Why this confusion, how restore the ravaged body of the world?} \]

And against this confusion he will invoke the saving force of Buddhism, the layman Vimalakirti who ‘at a word draws galaxies to the foot of his bed’, and Buddha himself, in a poem like ‘Spinning Dharma Wheel’, which ends:

\[\text{Three thousand years since Buddha found the morning star now sun itself is blinded by his light.} \]

The poet once wrote, ‘We must model ourselves on Bodhidharma, who kept sitting till his buttocks grew rotten. We must have done with all words and letters, and attain truth itself.’ This echo of Lao Tzu in the Taoist classic Tao Teh Ching (‘He who knows does not speak’) is, as truth, relative; to communicate his wisdom, Lao Tzu had to speak, and Takahashi’s voice is inexhaustible. No one would question his seriousness, the near doctrinal tone of some of his work, yet his best poems pulse with zekki (Zen dynamism), flowing spontaneously from the formless self and partaking of the world’s fullness:

\[\text{CAMEL} \]
\[\text{The camel’s hump shifted with clouds.} \]
\[\text{Such solitude beholds! My arms stretch beyond mountain peaks, flame in the desert.} \]

Such are the three major phases of Zen poetry, spanning nearly 1,500 years from the earliest examples to the present, and displaying distinctive characteristics: the Chinese master Reito would very likely have appreciated Shinkichi Takahashi, much as Takahashi values Reito. This consistency, while very special, is by no means inexplicable. The philosophy underlying the poetry is today, in every respect, precisely what it was in Tang China: it worked then, it works now, in the face of all that would seem bent on undermining it. In Japan, where industry is king, the need for Zen intensifies, and particular care is taken to preserve its temples and art treasures, numbered among the nation’s glories.

Perhaps today Zen’s spirit shines most purely in its poetry, some of which is familiar to all, wherever they happen to live and however limited their knowledge of the philosophy. Yet consciously or not, those who care for Fuyo-Dokai, Issa, Shinkichi Takahashi, know Zen – as much as those who revere Mu-chi and Sesshu. For to respond strongly to poetry and painting is to understand the source of their inspiration, just as to relate fully to others is to understand Zen’s interpenetration – more completely than do those who, though familiar with its terminology, are incapable of attaining its spiritual riches. Walt Whitman, a poet much admired by Zenists, wrote in ‘Song of the Sower’:

\[\text{We consider hedges and religious divine – I do not say they are not divine, I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still, It is not they who give the life, it is you who give the life, Leaves are not more shed from the trees, or trees from the earth, than they are shed out of you.} \]

Zen always travelled well in time and space, through denying them. Its poetry will continue to move some to heroic efforts towards light, constantly delight others – which is as it should be. ‘Zen is offering something,’ the master Taigen Takayama said, ‘and offering it directly. People just can’t seem to grasp it.’ Zen not only offers itself directly, but everywhere, and nowhere more authentically than in poems written in its name and honour, as the Chinese layman Sotoba realized 1,000 years ago when he wrote in his enlightenment:

\[\text{The mountain – Buddha’s body, The torrent – his preaching, Last night, eighty-four thousand poems, How, how make them understand?} \]

\[\text{CHIFU} \]

\[\text{SIDE 1} \]
\[\text{Band 1} \]
\[\text{Ox bridge tossed, vows taken, I’m robed and shaved clean. You ask why Bodhidharma came east? Staff thrust out, I am like mad.} \]

\[\text{BEITO} \]

\[\text{Twenty years a pilgrim, Footing east, west. Back in Seiken, I’ve never moved an inch.} \]

\[\text{SEIKEN-CHIJO} \]

\[\text{The old master held up staff, And blew from his palm, Revealing the Source itself. Look where clouds hide the peak.} \]

\[\text{KAIGEN} \]

\[\text{The mountain – Buddha’s body, The torrent – his preaching, Last night, eighty-four thousand poems, How, how make them understand?} \]

\[\text{LAYMAN SOTOBH (1036–1103)} \]

\[\text{How long the tree’s been barren, At its top long ropes of cloud, Since I smoothed the mud-ball’s horns, The stream’s flowed backwards.} \]

\[\text{HOGE} \]

\[\text{On the rocky slope, blossoming Plums – from where? Once he saw them, Rejoin Danced all the way, to Sandai.} \]

\[\text{HOIN} \]

Joshu’s ‘Oak in the courtyard’
Handed down, yet lost in leafless branch
They miss the root. Disciple Koku shouts – ‘Joshu never said a thing!’

\[\text{MONJU-SHINDO} \]

\[\text{No dust speak anywhere, What’s old? new? As home on my blue mountain, I want for nothing.} \]

\[\text{SHOFU} \]

\[\text{Loving old priceless things, I’ve scorned those seeking Truth outside themselves. Here, on the tip of the nose.} \]

\[\text{LAYMAN MAKUSHO} \]

\[\text{Tracelss, no more need to hide, Now the old mirror Reflects everything – autumn light Moistened by light mist.} \]

\[\text{SUHAN} \]
No more head shaving,
Washing flesh.
Pile high the wood,
Set it aflame!

--- CHITSU ---

Forty-nine years —
What a din!
Eighty-seven springs —
What pleasures!
What’s having? Not having?
Dreaming, dreaming.
Plum trees snow-laden,
I’m ready!

--- UNCHO ---

Life’s as we
Find it — death too.
A portion poem?
Why, listen?

--- DAI-E-SOKO (1089-1165) ---

Seventy-two years I’ve hung
The karma mirror.
Smashing through,
I’m on the Path!

--- IKU-MYOTAN ---

All things come apart.
No saniety sign
In these poor bones —
Screw their ashes
Ooza Yangtze waves.
The First Principle, everywhere.

--- DAISEN ---

Finally out of reach —
No bondage, no dependency.
How calm the ocean,
Towering the Void.

--- TESSHO ---

Fifty-three years
This clumsy ox has managed,
Now barefoot stalks
The Void — what nonsense!

--- SEKISHITSU-SOKEI ---

Coming, I clench my hands,
Going, spread them wide.
Once through the barrier,
A lotus stem will
Drag an elephant!

--- DANKYO-MYORIN (13th century) ---

Seventy-eight awkward years —
A clownish lay.
The mud-bull
Toss the ocean floor.
In June, snowflakes.

--- ICHIGEN ---

How Zenmitsu carry on
About the birthless?
What madness makes me toll,
As noon, the midnight bell?

--- GEKKO-SOJO ---

--- DOGEN (1200-1253) ---

Coming, going, the waterfowl
Leaves not a trace,
Nor does it need a guide.

--- MUSO (1275-1351) ---

At last I’ve broken Unno’s barrier!
There’s exit everywhere — east, west, north, south.
In the morning, out at evening, neither host nor guest.
My every step stirs up a little breeze.

--- DAIITO (1282-1337) ---

Refreshing, the wind against the waterfall
At the moon hang, a lantern, on the peak
And the bamboo window glows. In old age mountains
Are more beautiful than ever. My resolve;
That these bones be purified by rocks.

--- JA-KUSHI-TO (1290-1367) ---

Beyond the match of time, my daily life.
I respect the State, unshackle the universe.
Denying cause and effect, like the moon sky,
My up-down career: Buddhists nor Patriarchs can convey it.

--- JUKI (1296-1380) ---

Magnificent! Magnificent!
No one knows the final word.
The ocean bed’s aflame,
Out of the void leap wooden lambs.

--- FUMON (1302-69) ---

For all these years, my certain Zen:
Neither I nor the world exists.
The sutras nest within the box,
My cane hooked upon the wall,
I lie as peace in moonlight.
Or, hearing water plashing on the rock,
Sit up: none can purchase pleasure such as this:
Spangled across the step-moss, a million coins!

--- SHUTAKU (1308-88) ---

Mind set free in the Dharma-realm,
I sit at the moon-filled window
Witching the mountains with my ears,
Hearing the stream with open eyes.
Each molecule preaches perfect law,
Each molecule chants true sutra.
The most fleeting thoughts is timeless,
A single hair’s enough to stir the sea.

--- SHUTAKU ---

Why bother with the world?
Let others go gre, bustling east, west.
In this mountain temple, lying half-in,
Half-out, I’m removed from joy and sorrow.

--- RYUSEN (1308-88) ---

After the spring song, ‘Tast amuse, no holiness’,
Comes the song of snow-wind along the Yangtze River.
Late at night I too play, the noiseless flute of Shornin,
Piercing the mountains with its sound, the river.

--- SHENOKI (1311-88) ---
FORM IN VOID
The tree is stripped,
All colour, fragrance gone,
Yes already on the bough,
Uncaring spring !

IKKYU
Taking hold, one's assent to nothingness,
Leaving go, the Origin's regained.
Since the music stopped, no shadow's touched
My door: again the village moon's above the river.

KOKAI (1403-69)

ON JOSHI'S NOTHINGNESS
Earth, mountains, rivers: hidden in this nothingness.
In this nothingness: earth, mountains, rivers revealed.
Spring flowers, winter snows:
There's no being nor non-being, nor denial itself.

SAISHO (?-1506)

Why, it's but the motion of eyes and brows!
And here I've been seeking it so far and wide.
Awakened at last, I find the moon
Above the pines, the river surging high.

YUISHUN (?-1544)

Though night after night
The moon is stream-reflected,
Try to find where it has touched.
Points even to a shadow.

TAKAN (1573-1645)

Whirled by the three passions, one's eyes go blind;
Closed to the world of things, they see again.
In this way I live, straw-haired, staff in hand,
I move illuminously, through earth, through heaven.

UNGO (1580-1659)

Here none think of wealth or fame,
All talk of right and wrong is quelled:
In autumn I rake the leaf-banked stream,
In spring attend the nightingale.

DAIGU (184-1660)

Who dares approach the lim's
Mountain cave? Cold, robust,
A Zen-man through and through,
I let the spring breeze enter at the gate.

DAIGU

Unfettered at last, a travelling monk,
I pass the old Zen barrier.
Mine is a traceless stream-and-cloud life.
Of those mountains, which shall be my home?

MANAN (1591-1644)

FORM IN VOID
When, just as they are,
White dewdrops gather
On scarlet maple leaves,
Regard the scarlet heads!

IKKYU (1384-1455)

After ten years in the red-light districts,
How solitary a spell in the mountains.
I see clouds a thousand miles away,
Hear ancient music in the pines.

IKKYU (1394-1481)

SIDE 2
Band I

Unaware of illusion or enlightenment,
From this stone I watch the mountains, hear the stream.
A three-day rain has cleansed the earth,
A rose of thunder split the sky.
Ever serene are linden phenomena,
And though the mind's alert, it's but an ash heap.
Chilly, bleak as the desk I move through,
I return, a basket brimmed with peaches on my arm.

GENSO (?-1509)

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MANAN (1591-1644)
WHAT IS MOVING
When I turned to look back
Over the waters
The sky was birdless.

Men were, are born.
Do I still live? I ask myself,
Munching a sweet potato.

Don't smell of death,
Don't cast its shadow.
Any woman when I glance her way,
Looks down,
Unable to stand it.
Men, as if dead,
Turn up the whites of their eyes.

Get rid of those trashy ideas—
The same thing
Runs through both of us.
My thought moves the world:
I move, it moves.
I crook my arm, the world's crooked.

TIME
Time like a lake crease
Touched his face,
All thought left his mind.

One morning the sun, menacing,
Rose from behind a mountain,
Singling—like hope—the trees.

Fully awakened, he lit his pipe
And summed the sun-inhaling poet.
Time poured down—like rain, like fruit.

He glanced back and saw a ship
Moving towards the past. In one hand
He gripped the sail of eternity,
And stuffed the universe into his eyes.

FISH
I hold a newspaper, reading.
Suddenly my hands become cow ears,
Then turn into Puasa, the South Korean port.

Lying on a mat
Spred on the bankside stones,
I fell asleep.
But a willow leaf, breeze-tipped,
Brushed my ear.
I remained just as I was,
Near the murmurous water.

When young there was a girl
Who became a fish for me.
Whenever I wanted fish
Broiled in salt, I'd summon her.
She'd get down on her stomach
To be sun-cooked on the stones.
And she was always ready

Alas, she no longer comes to me.
An old besighted dukes,
I hobble homeward.
But look, my drake feet become horse hoofst
Now they drop off
And, stretching marvellously,
Become the tracks of the Tokaido Railway Line.

II
In the Three Whites of
Hokusai—
Fuji, the snow, the crane—

What stutters is the black: in
The outline
Of the mountain, the branch-tips

Piercing the snow, the quills of
The crane's wing:
Meaning impermanence.

Here, in stainless air, the
Artist's name
Blazes like a crow.

III
Distance between the rocks,
Half the day
In shadow, is the distance
Between man who thinks
And the man
Who thinks he thinks: wait.

Like a brain, the garden,
Thinking when
It is thought. Otherwise

A stony jumble, merely that,
Laid down there
To stud our emptiness.

IV
Who calls her butterfly
Would elsewhere
Pardon the snake its fangs?

In the stony garden
Where she sits
Are sides so sharp, merely

To look gives pain. Only
The tourist,
Kodak aimed and ready for

The blast, ship pointing for the
Getaway,
Dare raise that parasol.

V
To rid the grass of weed, to get
The whole root,
Thick, tangled, takes a strong mind
And desire—to make clean, make pure.
The weed, tough
As the rock it leaps against,
Unless plucked to the last
Live fiber
Will plunge up through dark again.
The weed also has the desire
To make clean,
Make pure, there against the rock.

VI
It is joy that lifts those pigeons to
Stitch the clouds
With circling, light flashing from underwings.
Scoring our crumbs, tossed carefully
To corners
Of the garden, beyond the rocks,
They rose as if summoned from
The futil
Grooming our love subjects them to.
Clear the mind! Empty it of all that
Fixes you,
Makes every act a pecking at the crumb.

VII
Firmness is all; that mountain beyond the
Garden path,
Watch how against its tawny slope
The candelled boughs expire. Follow
The slope where
Spearheads shake against the clouds
And dizzy the pigeons circling on the wind.
Then observe
Where no bigger than a cragstone
The climber pulls himself aloft,
As by the
Very guts; firmness is all.

VIII
Pierced through by birdsong, stone by stone
The garden
Gathered light. Darkness, hauled by ropes
Of sun, entered roof and bough. Raised from
The temple
Floor where, stiff since cockcrow,
Blown round like Buddha on the lotus,
He began
To write. How against that shimmering,
On paper frail as dawn, make poems?
Firm again,
He waited for the rocks to split.

The Duckpond
I
Crooks, daffodil:
already the pond’s
clear of ice
where, winter long,
ducks and gulls
slid for crusts.
People circle—
pale, bronchitic,
jesting behind dogs,
grope toward lawnchairs
spread like islands
on the grass.
Sunk there, they lift faces to the sun.

II
Good Friday.
Ducks carry on,
a day like any other.
Same old story:
no one seems to care.
A loudmouth
leader of a many host
spik’d to a cross,
as blackbirds in certain
lands neighboring on
that history are played
on fences, warning
to their kind. A duck soars from the reeds.

III
Man and woman
argue past the duckpond,
his arms flaying
She, head down—even
by the fully budded
cherry, clustered
 Lilac boughs. Not once
do they forget
their bitterness,
face the gift of morning
ducks wake to
in the reeds.
They have things to settle, and they will.

IV
On my favorite
bench beside the roses
I watch ducks
smoothing feathers,
breathing it all in.
Catching the headline
where the bird fits
I’m reminded
three men were shot up
at the moon. I turn
back to the roses:
what
if they don’t make it? If they do?

V
Lying near the pond
in fear of the stray
dog that daily
roams the park,
ducks know
their limitations,
and the world’s—
how long it takes,
precisely,
to escape the paw thrusts
of the dog,
who once again
swings round to chase his tail.

VI
Radio tower
beyond the blossoms,
ducks
here in the pond,
139 connection
between them—

how did I discover
this, and why?
Was it
the blue air? The bench
moves beneath
us like a seashaw,
the pond sends news of the world.

VII
What becomes of things
we make or do?
The Japanese lantern
or from across the pond
beneath the trees
a drift
of voices cultured
and remote: water
will carry anything
that floats. The lantern
maker, the couple
chatting there
would be amazed to find themselves
a poem.

VIII
When tail wagging
in the breeze
the duck pokes
bills into the pondbed,
keeps it there,
my daughter thinks
him fun—he is, yet how to say
those acrobatics
aren’t meant
to jollyfy the day. He’s
hungry, poking
away at nothing
for crumbs we failed to bring: how to
tell her?

IX
Ducks lie close together
in morning dew, wary-eyed.
Bills pointing at the pond:
roused by squirrel,
those early risers,
air’s a-whir with wings.

Sad to think of leaving
this place. A helicopter
with mysterious purpose
appears above the trees,
moving low. Its circles
tighten.
the ducks cling to the pondedge,
right to fear.

Awakening
Homage To Hakuin,
Zen Master, 1685-1768

I
Shoichi brushed the black
on thick.
His circle held a poem
like buds
above a flowering bowl.
Since the moment of my
pointing,
this bowl, an “earth device,”
holds
nothing but the dawn.

II
A freeze last night, the window’s
laced ice flowers, a meadow drifting
from the glacier’s side. I think of
Hakuin:
“Freezing in an icefield, stretched
thousands of miles in all directions,
I was alone, transparent, and could
not move.”

Legs cramped, mind pointing
like a torch. I cannot see beyond
the frost, out nor in. And do not
move.

III
I balance the round stone
in my palm,
turn it full circle,
slowly, in the late sun,
spring to now.

Severe compression,
like a troubled head,
slings my hand.
It falls. A small dust rises.

IV
Beyond the sycamore
dark air moves
westward—
smoke, cloud, something
wanting a name.
Across the window,
my gathered breath,
I trace
a simple word.

V
My daughter gathers shells
where thirty years before
I’d turned them over, marveling.
I take them from her,
make, at her command,
the universe. Hands clasped,
marking the limits of a
world, we watch till sundown
planets whirling in the sand.

VI
Softness everywhere,
snow a smear,
air a gray sack.

Time. Place. Thing.
Felt between
skin and bone, flesh.

VII
I write in the dark again,
rather by duck-light,
and what I love about
this hour is the way the trees
are taken, one by one,
into the great wash of darkness.
At this hour I am always happy,
ready to be taken myself,
fully aware.