

MODEL SUBJECT NO. 49 FROM THE HEKIGAN ROKU (BLUE CLIFF RECORDS)

with a commentary by Engo Zengi, translated by Reverend Susuki, Master of Zen Center

San-cho and 'The Golden Scales' Escaping From the Net

64-03-BC, 492

Introductory Word:

Engo introducing the subject said: Seven piercings and eight holes, snatching the drums and carrying off the banner (in war-time to pierce the enemy's lines in seven or eight places and to snatch the enemy's drums and banner is metaphorically compared to the great activity of San-cho in the main subject). A hundred ramparts and a thousand entrenchments, watching the front and guarding the rear (comparisons to Sep-po's way of attending to San-cho). Or sitting on the tiger's head and seizing its tail: such is not good enough to compare to the great activity of a skillful Zen master (San-cho). Even though an ox-head disappears and a horse-head appears, this would not be miraculous enough (in comparison to the skill of Sep-po). So ponder what you will do, if you come across a man of such surpassingly great activity.

Main Subject:

Attention! San-cho asked Sep-po: "What does a mysterious golden-scaled carp escaped from the fishing net eat?" Sep-po said, "I would like to wait for your coming out of the fishing net and then answer you." San-cho said, "You, who have fifteen hundred disciples do not understand what I say." Sep-po said: "This old monk is too busy in managing temple affairs to attend to you."

Appreciatory Word (by Set-cho with notes by Reverend Susuki)

"Do not say that the golden carp which has jumped out of the fishing net is staying quietly in the water. (He is) loosening the heavens, moving the earth, shaking his fins, opening out his tail." (This refers to San-cho's statement: 'You, who have 1500 disciples...etc.')

"Spouting water to a thousand feet, a great white whale will leap through the flood. After a great thunderstorm, a cool wind came." (This refers to Sep-po's statement: 'This old monk is too busy...etc.')

"Oh this wonderful pure clean wind, who knows the mystery of such tremendous cleansing power!"

Interpretation of the Main Subject (A direct translation of Engo's remarks in the 'Hyo-sho', with some notes by Reverend Susuki).

Sep-po and San-cho--with questions and answers, giving and taking, crossing words with one another--neither won nor lost. Just think what kind of wisdom they have. San-cho had received Rin-zai's transmission and had traveled many places. It is no wonder that he was treated as a high monk. Look at the following questions and answers made between Sep-po and him. Perhaps not many people can understand the deep meaning of this dialogue without being in the realm of radical Buddhism.

San-cho asked Sep-po: "What does the mysterious golden carp escaped from a fishing net eat?" Now ponder what he meant. What is the food for that golden-scaled fish? Sep-po, who was also a great master said to San-cho: "I would like to wait for your coming-out from the net and then answer you."

Fun-yo called the kind of question that San-cho asked, "a question presenting one's own understanding," (and in the Soto school they call this kind of question a "metaphorical question.") You may say that San-cho was a real golden-scaled carp escaped from the fishing net with a great incomparable wisdom and activity. However, Sep-po, a skillful master, did not give San-cho full play, saying: "I will wait for your coming-out of the net." Look! Those two masters are standing at the top of the ten thousand foot cliff!

However, but for San-cho's next instantaneous statement, the question and answer would not make full sense. San-cho said to Sep-po: "Although you are a teacher of fifteen hundred students, you do not know how to question and answer." To this Sep-po said: "I may have been mistaken to listen to you, because I am very busy in managing temple work." Look! He became very droll!

In the manner of confrontation of the two great masters' skill, there are no restrictions: sometimes grasping, sometimes granting, to the strong with the weak, to the humble with the polite. According to the circumstances, they express themselves at their own will. If you try to understand this subject with the idea of winning or losing, you will never see San-cho, even in your dreams.

"Such is the two well-trained Zen-masters' way," said Engo, "at first they are tough and later droll. Do you still ask which has won or lost? The way of confrontation between other Zen masters is not always like this."

In order to make clear what a good Zen master San-cho was, Engo then said: Once San-cho was a head monk of Rin-zai's monastery. When Rin-zai was about to pass away, he gave his students the last sermon and said: "After my Nirvana, you should not destroy the treasury of my right Dharma eye." San-cho came up to him and said: "How dare we destroy it?" Rin-zai said: "If someone asks you about my right Dharma eye, what will you say?" San-cho gave a "Katsu!" (a loud shout). Rin-zai then said: "Who would expect that my right Dharma eye is going to vanish into that donkey's belly!" Hereby San-cho made obeisance to Rin-zai (to show his utmost respect to Rin-zai). San-cho was Rin-zai's true successor, and questions and answers between them were like this.