

The mouths are moving

A well known Zen anecdote is the Gateless Gate (Wúmén'guān; Japanese Mumon-kan) case 29. Two monks notice a temple flag flapping. One argues that the flag is moving; the other says it is the wind. The Sixth Patriarch comes along and declares both of them wrong: it is the mind that is moving, he declares!

Centuries later, Brahmavamso, a forest dhyana master, in one of his public talks in Singapore in 2005,¹ humorously declares *all three to be wrong*: their mouths are moving!

Modern commentary by this non-zensical Singaporean ignoramus: All the four mouths are moving! Not mine: only my fingers are moving over the computer keyboard, gazing silly at the pixels.

But when I relate this well known story to my class, I add that I'm also one of those whose mouths are moving. This is when you in your silence are the wisest of all. Anyway, it's a matter of time before you move your own mouth about this to someone else.

Such living exchanges are a healthy reminder for us to go beyond conceptual language and dogmatic hard-heartedness, and experience the conditioned nature of the world, if not to taste not-self or emptiness itself.

Let us now look at the original story from the Wumenguan (Jap: Mumonkan), and discover a surprise: that Huikai had after all anticipated us all! That's how Chan masters work!

無門關 第二十九 公案 六祖之 非風非幡

Wú mén'guān dì'èr shí jiǔ gōng'àn Liù zǔ zhī fēi fēng fēi fān

Wúmén'guān case 29: The Sixth Patriarch's "Not wind, not flag"

因風颺刹幡。有二僧、對論。

yīn fēng yáng chà fān yǒu èr sēng, duì lùn

A temple flag [streamer] was flapping because of the wind. Two monks were arguing.

一云、幡動。一云、風動。

yì yún, fān dòng. yì yún, fēng dòng.

One said, "The flag is moving!" The other said, "The wind is moving!"

往復曾未契理。

wǎng fù céng wèi qì lǐ

They argued back and forth, but could not reach a conclusion.

祖云、不是風動、不是幡動、仁者心動。

zǔ yún, bú shì fēng dòng, bú shì fān dòng, rén zhě xīn dòng

The Patriarch said, "It is not the wind that is moving: it is not the flag that is moving—it is your mind that is moving!"

¹ See *Dhamma Journal* 2004 5,1:13, or ch 14 of Brahmavamso's forthcoming book, *The Beautiful Breath*.

The Mouths are Moving by Piya Tan

二僧悚然。

èr sēng sǒng rán

The two monks were awe-struck.

Wumen's Comment

無門曰、不是風動、不是幡動、不是心動、甚處見祖師。

Wú mén yuè, bú shì fēng dòng, bú shì fān dòng, bú shì xīn dòng, shěn chù jiàn Zǔshī.

Wumen says: "It is not the wind that moves; it is not the flag that moves; it is not the mind that moves. How do you see the patriarch?"

若向者裏見得親切、方知二僧買鐵得金。

ruò xiàng zhě lǐ jiàn de qīn qiè, fāng zhī èr sēng mǎi tiě de jīn.

If you see this deeply [If you truly understand this], then you will know that the two monks, buying iron, received gold.

祖師忍俊不禁、一場漏逗。

Zǔ shī rěn jùn bù jīn, yì cháng lòu dòu.

The venerable Patriarch could not hold back his mirth, teasing them for a while."

Wumen's Verse 頌曰 sòng yuè

風幡心動

fēng fān xīn dòng

Wind, flag, and mind are moving:

一狀領過

yì zhuàng lǐng guò

All are equally to blame.

只知開口

zhǐ zhī kāi kǒu

They only know how to open their mouths,

不覺話墮

bù jué huà duò

Unaware of their fault in talking.

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