

Please Teach Me

Twenty years passed. During this time Won Hyo became the most famous monk in the land. He was the trusted advisor to the great king of Silla and preceptor to the noblest and most powerful families. Whenever he gave a public lecture, the hall was packed. He lived in a beautiful temple, taught the best students, ate the best food, and slept the dreamless sleep of the just.

Now at this time, in Silla, there was a very great Zen master—a little old man, with a wisp of a beard and skin like a crumpled paper bag. Barefoot and in tattered clothes he would walk through the towns ringing his bell. *De an, de an, de an, de an, don't think, de an, like this, de an, rest mind, de an, de an.* Won Hyo heard of him and one day hiked to the mountain cave where he lived. From a distance he could hear the sound of extraordinarily lovely chanting echoing through the valleys. But when he arrived at the cave he found the master sitting beside a dead fawn, weeping bitterly. Won Hyo was dumbfounded. How could an enlightened being be either happy or sad, since in the state of nirvana there is nothing to be happy or sad about and no one to be happy or sad? He stood speechless for a while, and then asked the master why he was weeping.

The master explained. He had come upon the fawn after its mother had been killed by hunters. It was very hungry, so he had gone into town and begged for milk. Since he knew that no one would give milk for an animal, he had said it was for his son. “A monk with a son? Dirty old man!” people thought. But some gave him a little milk. He had continued this way for a month, begging enough to keep the animal alive. Then the scandal became too great, and no one would help. He had been wandering for three days now, in search of milk. At last he had found some, but when he had returned to the cave, his fawn was already dead. “You don’t understand,” said the master. “My mind and the fawn’s mind are the same. It was very hungry. I want milk, I want milk. Now it is dead. Its mind is my mind. That’s why I am weeping. I want milk.”

Won Hyo began to understand how great a Bodhisattva the master was. When all creatures were happy, he was happy. When all creatures were sad, he was sad. He said to him, “Please teach me.” The master said, “All right. Come along with me.”

They went to the red-light district of town. The master took Won Hyo’s arm and walked up to the door of a whorehouse. *De an, de an,* he rang. A beautiful woman opened the door. “Today I’ve brought the great monk Won Hyo to visit you.” “Oh! Won Hyo!” she cried out. Won Hyo blushed. The woman blushed, and her eyes grew large. She led them upstairs to her room, in great happiness, fear, and exhilaration that the famous, handsome monk had come to her. As she prepared meat and wine for her visitors, the master said to Won Hyo, “For twenty years you’ve kept company with kings and princes and monks. It’s not good for a monk to live in heaven all the time. He must also visit hell and save the people there who are wallowing in their desires. Hell too is ‘like this.’ So tonight you will ride this wine straight to hell.” “But I’ve never broken a single Precept before,” Won Hyo said. “Have a good trip,” said the master.



He then turned to the woman and said, “Don’t you know that it’s a sin to give wine to a monk? Aren’t you afraid of going to hell?” “No,” the woman said; “Won Hyo will come and save me.” “A very good answer!” said the master.

So Won Hyo stayed the night, and broke more than one Precept. The next morning he took off his elegant robes and went dancing through the streets, barefoot and in tatters. *De-an, de-an, de-an! The whole universe is empty! What are you?!*