

THE TREASURE IN THE BODY

By Mary Jaksch

Blue Cliff Record, Case 62:

Yunmon said to the assembly, “ ‘Within heaven and earth, in the midst of the cosmos, there is one treasure, hidden in the body’. Holding a lantern, it goes to the Buddha hall. It brings the great triple gate and puts it on the lantern.”

Xuedou’s Verse:

*Look! Look!
On the ancient embankment, who holds the fishing pole;
Clouds role on.
The water, vast and boundless -
The white flowers in the moonlight,
you must see for yourself.*

Yunmen was born in 864CE at the tail end of the Tang Dynasty. It is said that he showed great intelligence as a young man. Records say that when he entered monastic training, he was noticeable for his refined spirit, his rectitude, and his great eloquence. Advancing fast, he was soon lecturing on the *vinaya*, the monastic code of conduct. But his heart was not yet at rest and he went on pilgrimage to see Master Muzhou. Muzhou was a recluse who left monastic life to care for his aging mother and then started to make sandals for passing pilgrims. He would secretly leave them by the wayside so that travelers could take them when their footgear wore out. As a teacher, Muzhou was fierce and you may recall the story of how young Yunmen finally awakened when Muzhou slammed the door on him and broke his leg!

In this story we meet Yunmen as a mature teacher. He is quoting from the *Jewel Treasury Treatise* and adding his comments. For a long time this treatise was thought to be by Seng Zhao (6.Century). However, scholars now see the *Jewel Treasury Treatise* as a late Tang text by an unknown author. The original text says:

Within heaven and earth, inside all the cosmos, there is contained a singular treasure concealed in the form-mountain—the numinous radiance of sentient beings. Utterly empty, still, and difficult to perceive within or without, it is styled the ‘mystery of mysteries.’¹

When we examine the phrase, ‘Within heaven and earth, in the midst of the cosmos, there is one treasure, hidden in the body’, we find it to be a treasure-map! Since time immemorial, humans have yearned to find treasures. I remember playing ‘treasure hunt’ as a child. We would draw a tattered, hardly legible and cryptic map and go on a pretend expedition. We imagined ourselves walking through deserts and through jungles to find the treasure.

The dream of treasure draws people of all ages, and some people's whole life is shaped by searching for treasure. There is a great story in the history of the *conquistadores* that rests on treasure: In 1539, three ships seeking treasure set out from Sevilla, bound for Patagonia, the southern tip of Argentina. One of the ships got separated from the others and was ship-wrecked. The hundred and fifty members of the crew managed to make it to the barren shore. Seventeen years later, the only two survivors, Antonio de Cobos and Pedro de Oviedo managed to reach Concepción in Chile. They had walked over the Andes. Later they told of finding the city of *Trapalanda*, where they found temples of gold and jewels. Many adventurous lost their life searching for this place, but it was never found.

All treasure stories tell of hardships. This is because the hardship of the way can purify the soul so that the seeker can receive the treasure. Yunmen too had spent many hard years searching for a treasure. He was searched not for gold or jewels, but for a spiritual treasure that would bring joy and ease to his life and to the lives of those around him. Having finally found it, he left us a map to follow, so that we too can find it. This map, our present koan, includes some cryptic clues. He says

A monk asked, "What's the problem?"

Yunmen said, "You don't know the smell of your own shit."

Some scholars take this to mean that the idea of a separate self is the root of all delusion. But this is not at all what Yunmen is referring to. Let's follow the trail he has left for us: The first point is that smell is something very personal. Every person has their own personal smell. I'm sure you could pick out someone you love intimately out of a line-up, even if you were blind-fold and could only go by smell! And each dwelling has its own smell, if someone or a group of people live there regularly. This smell is important to us and is one of the main factors that can make a dwelling feel like a home. But the strange thing is, and this is the second point, that we don't actually have awareness of these personal smells. We don't really know what our home smells like. And we can't perceive our own natural body smells. Why? Because they are so intimate! This is the point that Yunmen is making.

We could take this question and apply it to our present koan, "Why can't I perceive the treasure in the body?" The answer is the same: because it is intimate! And intimate means that there is no barrier at all. As long as you still remain in the world of barriers, where there is separation between *I* and *you*, *this* and *that*, *outside* and *inside*, the treasure will not reveal itself. This is what the unknown author of the Cloud of Unknowing makes:

And now you ask me how you shall destroy this naked knowing and feeling of your own being. Perhaps you finally realize that if you destroyed this, every other obstacle would be destroyed.²

When the obstacles are destroyed, and the treasure reveals itself to you, what then? How will you use it? Yuan Wu says in this comments, 'Some people acknowledge this radiant shining spirituality as the jewel; but they cannot make use of it, and they do not realize its

wondrousness.”³ Yunmon says: ‘Holding a lantern, it goes to the Buddha hall. It brings the great triple gate and puts it on the lantern.’ Yunmen’s first comment locates the treasure in the human body. The second point turns everything on its head. To our minds that tend to experience reality in a linear way, placing the great triple gate onto the lantern sounds like magic. What is this magical activity? Layman Pang said:

Miraculous power and marvelous activity –
Drawing water and hewing wood.⁴

You can use this treasure as you wake up in the morning, drink a cup of tea, do zazen, pore over the morning paper, and make breakfast and do the other myriad things that make up a day in our life. This is the miraculous power and marvelous activity!

How then can you find the treasure? If you look for it outside of yourself, you won’t find it, however long you search. If you look for it within yourself, you miss it. In the tradition there is a story about Chang Chiu-en and his experience of finding the treasure. It is said that he was sitting on the toilet pondering his koan when he suddenly heard the croak of a frog. He wrote the following poem:

In a moonlit night on a spring day,
The croak of a frog
Pierces through the whole cosmos
And turns it into a single family.

How is it that the croak of a frog turns the whole cosmos into a single family? In the Jewel-net of Indra, each jewel reflects all others. Thus, when the frog croaks, the whole cosmos becomes one family.

When you truly realize the treasure of the body, you become intimate with the whole cosmos and joy and freedom arise.

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¹ Adapted from: Robert L. Sharf, *Coming to terms with Chinese Buddhism*, 2002, University of Hawaii Press, p188.

² Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. William Johnston, 1973, New York, Doubleday, p103

³ The Blue Cliff Record, trans. Thomas Cleary, 1992, Boston, Shambala, p354.

⁴ Pang Yun (704-808) in: *The Way of Zen*, p221.