

骸骨

Skeletons

(*Gaikotsu*)

Ikkyū (1394–1481)¹

It is in the written word that all things can be seen together. In the beginning of mental evolution, one should concentrate on sitting meditation. Whatever is born in any land all becomes naught.

One's own body is not primary: not even the original face of sky and earth and all nations and lands is primary—all come from emptiness. Because it has no form, it is called Buddha, enlightened. Various names such as enlightened mind, mental buddha, mind of reality, buddhas, enlightened ancestors, spiritized ones—all come from this. Unless you realize this, you're going right to hell.

Also, according to the teaching of good people, we do not return after going separate ways into the lands of darkness; those who are close and those who are inconstant both revolve in the flow of the three realms—feeling ever more weary of this, I left my native village, going nowhere in particular.

Coming to an unfamiliar abandoned temple, even as I wrung out my sleeves, I realized it was already nightfall. With no way to get together even a grass pillow for a nap, as I looked around here and there, there were mossy graves at a distance from the path, near the foot of the mountain, where the fields of meditation were sparse. One especially miserable-looking skeleton came out from behind the hall and said:

The autumn wind has risen in the world,
in the fields and mountains where you'll go
when the fall flowers beckon.

What can be done for the body,

¹ Translated by Thomas F. Cleary in: *The Original Face: An Anthology of Rinzai Zen*, Grove Press, 1978. pp. 79–92.

as a black-dyed sleeve
in the heart of a man who wastes it?²

Everyone must sometime become naught. Becoming naught is called “returning to the fundamental.” When you sit facing a wall, the thoughts which arise from conditioning are all unreal. The Buddha’s fifty years of teachings are not real either. It’s just to know people’s minds.

Wondering if there were anyone who understands this suffering, I went into the hall and spent the night there, even lonelier than usual, unable to sleep.

Around dawn, as I dozed off a bit, in a dream I went out behind the hall, and saw a crowd of skeletons all acting in different ways, just like people in the world. As I watched with a sense of wonder, some skeletons came up and said:

When it passes
without a memory,
this worthless body
becomes a dream.

If you divide the way of enlightenment
into buddhas and kami,
how can you enter the true path?³

As long as it travels the road of life
in the present for a while,
the corpse in the fields

² The black-dyed sleeve symbolizes renunciation, as the robe of the homeless. A verse of Saint Ippen (1239–1289), a pure land sage of earlier Japan, says, “Giving up the body as well as the idea of giving up, an unthinking black-dyed sleeve in the world.” Contained in homonymy and association is the sense “You should live in the world after renunciation, giving up even the idea ‘I abandon.’” This is why Ikkyu still warns against wasting it.

³ *Kami* are nature spirits associated with Japanese earth and life consciousness; they were thought to protect, accept, and uphold Buddhist teachings. The aforementioned Saint Ippen received his major revelations through the mediumship of kami, and later taught the fundamental meaning of prayer underlying all forms of respect. Many eminent Buddhist teachers also preached the nonduality of the spirit and Buddha ways.

seems elsewhere.⁴

Anyway, as I got familiar with them and relaxed, the feeling I'd had of separation between myself and others disappeared. What's more, my skeleton companions wanted to give up the world and seek the truth; seeking separation from excess, going from shallow to deep—in searching out the source of one's own mind, what fills the ears is the sound of wind in the pines, what blocks the eyes is left on the pillow under the moon.

When are we not in a dream, when are we not skeletons, after all? Male and female forms exist only as long as these skeletons are wrapped up and put to use inside five-tone flesh; when life ends and the body bag breaks, there are no such forms—neither are high or low distinguished. Under the flesh which you now care for and enjoy, this skeleton is wrapped up and set in motion; you should acquiesce to this idea—in this there is no difference between high and low, old and young. Only when you awaken to the condition of the one great matter will you know the imperishable truth.

If a stone is good enough
for an effigy after death,
hang a scrap of writing
on a monument of five elements.

What is it? Oh! A frightening figure of a man!

While you have the single cloudless moon
how have you come to the darkness
of the fleeting world?

You must think it true; when the breath stops and the skin of the body comes apart, everyone turns out like this—your body cannot live forever.

A sign of how long is your time

⁴ The corpse in the fields that seems elsewhere is the living body. A verse of Saint Ippen says: "Is it meaningless? While the corpse has not yet decayed, the meadow earth seemed to be elsewhere." This he spoke at the ruins of his grandfather's grave.

are the pines of Sumiyoshi
planted before.

Give up the mind that thinks there is a self; just go with the wind driving the floating cloud of the body, and come this way. You want to live indefinitely, to the same age; you would really think so—this is the same frame of mind.

Since the world is a sleepless dream,
in vain do people start awake
upon seeing this.

It is useless to pray for a definite lifespan. You shouldn't keep anything on your mind except the One Great Matter. Since life in the human world is uncertain, it is not a matter of awakening to this just now for the first time. Since it is a way to become detached, the sorrow of the world is quite happy.

Why adorn a mere temporary form?
Didn't you know it had to be temporary like this?

The original body must return
to the original place;
don't seek out where you won't go.

Nobody understands life;
there is no dwelling place—
when you return, you must become
the original earth.

Although there are many paths
up the base of the mountain,
we see the same moon on the high peak.

Since where you are going
you don't establish a home there,

there's not even a road to get lost on.

Having no beginning or end,
one's mind should not be thought of
as being born, or dying.

Left to do as it will,
the mind doesn't even think things through—
better to have controlled it
and given up the world.

Rain, sleet, snow, ice—
as such they may be different,
but when melted they're the same valley stream water.

Although the path of the liberated mind may change,
behold the same law
of the cloud dweller.⁵

A straight path buried under the fallen pine needles;
hardly do we realize it is a house where people dwell.

How hopeless, the trip to the funeral pyre—⁶
as the fallen, they must stay.

[Is it transitory, the trip to the burning pyre?
as the fallen, they must stay.]

Tired of the world,
how long will you see the evening smoke of the pyre
as another's sorrow?

How fleeting, the faces of the people

⁵ The law of the cloud dweller is impermanence; in ancient texts it is sometimes used for absolute transcendence or absolute indifference—we might say “death”, as the most personal and cutting expression of impermanence. The great Zen master Hakuin wrote that one who sees into death is safe.

⁶ The Japanese uses the name of a mountain where bodies were taken to be burned. The variant English reading in parentheses is to highlight the allusion to the sense of the permanence of impermanence.

whom we saw only yesterday,
as they vanish into the smoky evening.

So sad, the evening smoke of the funeral pyres;
only the sky is left behind by the wind,
as it was before.

Of what becomes ash when burnt, earth when buried,
what could be left as sin?

The sins committed up till the age of three
all disappear together,
as does eventually the self.

This must be what is certain in the world. Thinking how vain are those who do not realize that even today, right now, there must be such helplessness and death, and are startled by it, if asked how their lives should be, some say that these days, unlike the past, they are leaving the temples. In olden times, those who aspired to the way would enter a monastery, but nowadays they are all leaving the monasteries.

When you look at them, the monks have no knowledge, they don't like to sit and meditate; without making any efforts, they admire utensils, adorn cushions—full of conceit, they make their reputation just by wearing the robe, but even wearing the robe of monkhood, they are surely just lay people in disguise. Even though they wear the robe and surplice, the robe becomes a rope tying them up, and the surplice becomes an iron rod thrashing them, so it seems.

If we look carefully into the meaning of the cycles of birth and death, destroying life leads to hell, by greed we become hungry ghosts, by ignorance we become animals, by anger we become titans; by maintaining the five precepts⁷ we are born human, and by carrying out the ten virtues⁸

⁷ The five precepts are not to kill on purpose; not to steal in any way, even indirectly; not to be greedy or overindulgent in the course of human life; not to drink or sell liquor; and not to lie.

⁸ “Ten virtues” can have several references. Commonly they refer to the preceding five moral precepts, plus not talking about people's faults, not praising yourself and degrading others,

we are born divine. Above these state are the four holy ones⁹—added all together, they make ten realms.

Looking at this single moment of thought,¹⁰ it has no shape, it abides nowhere for its duration, and there is nothing in it to despise and reject. It is like clouds in the vast sky, like bubbles on the water. Just because there are no thoughts arising, there is nothing to do either. Thoughts and things are one emptiness. I don't know about people's doubts.

People's parents are like striking fire: the steel is the father; the flint is the mother; the spark is the child. Setting this to a wick, when the sustenance of fuel and oil is exhausted, the fire goes out. When the father and mother make love, that is like the fire coming forth; since father and mother have no beginning, eventually they fade away in the mind where the fire has gone out. Openly embracing all things through emptiness, all

not being stingy or predatory, not being angry without shame, and not repudiating the three treasures of the enlightened ones, their teaching and their communities. In the most ancient teachings, it is said that the Buddha had monks restrain useless mundane talk, but rather discourse on the merits and virtues of ten things: effort, little desire and being content, bravery, learning and the ability to explain the teaching to others, being fearless and unawed, being impeccable in conduct, being accomplished in meditation, wisdom and knowledge, liberation, and the vision and knowledge of liberation. In the esoteric teachings, in which terms Ikkyu sometimes wrote, there are two explanations: one is not regressing from the determination for enlightenment; not abandoning the three treasures to seek outside ways; not slandering the three treasures and the scriptures of the three vehicles; not doubting places in the very profound scriptures of the great vehicle where you don't understand them; not discouraging anyone determined on enlightenment or causing them to tend to self-enlightenment; not causing uninspired people to go into the lesser vehicles of self-enlightenment; not speaking hastily about the great vehicle in front of those following the lesser vehicles or wrong ideas; not inspiring false ideas; not saying in the presence of outsiders that you have the wonderful precepts of enlightenment; not doing anything harmful or useless to sentient beings. A second set: not abandoning the true teaching; not giving up the spirit of enlightenment; not being stingy with the teachings; not doing anything that is not beneficial to sentient beings; not slandering any of the teachings of the three vehicles; not begrudging teachings; not having false views, like nihilism; encouraging people not to give up their aspiration for enlightenment; not preaching unsuitable teachings to people without consideration of their faculties; not giving people anything that will harm them.

⁹ The four holy states are sainthood (*arhat*), self-enlightenment (*pratyeka-buddha*), *bodhisattva*, and buddhahood.

¹⁰ The ten realms are born of a single moment of thought.

forms are produced. When you let go of all forms, this is called the basic ground. All forms—of plants, trees, and land—all come from emptiness, so as a temporary metaphor it is called the fundamental ground.

When you break up a cherry tree and look,
there are no flowers at all;
the flowers are brought by the spring wind.
Even though you soar boundlessly
even beyond the clouds,
just don't rely on
the teachings of Gautama.

If, hearing the teachings spoken by Gautama over fifty years, you want to try to put the teachings into practice, what Gautama said at the end was that from the beginning to the end he had not said a single word; instead, he raised a flower in his hand, whereat Kasyapa smiled faintly. Then Gautama said, "I have the straight-forward heart of the true teaching," and put down the flower. If you wonder what it means, Gautama said, in effect, "What I have been teaching for some fifty years is like when you're cuddling a baby pretending to be holding something in your hand; my fifty-odd years of teaching was like this call to Kasyapa."

Therefore the teachings which he transmitted were like the cuddling of the baby. But this flower cannot be known by means of the body, nor is it the mind; even speaking of it, you cannot know it. You should understand this body and mind thoroughly. Even if you are called a knowledgeable person, you cannot [therefore] be called a Buddhist. As for this flower, the teaching of the one vehicle of all the buddhas of past, present, and future appearing in the world refers to this flower. From the twenty-eight patriarchs in India and six patriarchs in China up till now, there has never been anything but the fundamental ground. Because everything is beginningless, it is called great; all modes of consciousness are produced from emptiness.

Even the summer, fall, and winter of the flowers of spring, the colors of

the plants and trees, also are made from emptiness.

Also, the so-called four gross elements are earth, water, fire, and air. People hardly know what these are. Breath is air, warmth is fire, body fluid is water; if you burn or bury this, it becomes earth. There, too, because there is no beginning, nothing remains at all.

Whatever it is
is nothing but the world of delusion
since even "death" does not turn out
to be a real vacation.

Everybody, everybody, in the eyes of illusion though the body dies the spirit does not die—this is a great mistake. In the language of the enlightened, they say that the body and the seed die as one. Even "Buddha" means emptiness. You should return to the basic ground of sky, earth, land, and everything. Giving up the eighty thousand teachings of all the scriptures, just understand this all rolled into one. You will become people of great peace and happiness.

Even written down,
they're just marks made in a dream;
after waking up, there is no one else who asks.

4/8/1457 Ikkyu-shi Sojun,
seventh generation after Xutang,
in Daitoku Temple before the eastern sea.

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Ikkyū (1394–1481)¹

The myriad Laws are seen written in thin India ink.² But the beginner must do zazen earnestly. Then he will realize that there is nothing born into this world which will not eventually become “empty.” Oneself and the original face of heaven and earth and all the world are equally empty. All things emerge from the “emptiness.” Being formless it is called “Buddha.” The Mind of Buddha, the Buddhahood, the Buddha in our minds, Buddhas, Patriarchs, and Gods are different names of this “emptiness,” and should you not realize this you have fallen into the Hell of ignorance and false imagination. According to the teaching of an enlightened man, the way of no return³ is the separation from Hell and rebirth, and the thought of so many people, whether related to me or not, passing through reincarnations one after another, made me so melancholy, I left my native place and wandered off at random.

I came to a small lonely temple. It was evening, when dew and tears wet one’s sleeves, and I was looking here and there for a place to sleep, but there was none. It was far from the highway, at the foot of a mountain, what seemed a Samadhi Plain. Graves were many, and from behind the Buddha Hall there appeared a most miserable- looking skeleton, which uttered the following words:

¹ Translation by R. H. Blyth & N. A. Waddell, *The Eastern Buddhist*, N. S. Vol. VI. No. 1 (May 1973), pp. 111–125. Ch. 6. in *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School and Its Contemporaries*, edited by Frederick Franck, World Wisdom, 2004, pp. 69–79.

² The first sentence reads literally, “It is because they are written in thin India-ink letters that the myriad Laws [Dharmas] are seen.” Ikkyū seems to be suggesting that the truth can be seen more readily in an informal, easily written work like this than in some elaborately conceived philosophical discourse. “Thin India ink” probably refers as well to the fact the work is written in Japanese instead of the Chinese usually employed by Buddhist writers.

³ “The way of no return” seems to refer to enlightenment; once gained one never again falls back into illusion.

The autumn wind
Has begun to blow in this world;
Should the pampas grass invite me,
I will go to the moor,
I will go to the mountain.

What to do
With the mind of a man
Who should purify himself
Within the black garment,
But simply passes life by.

All things must at some time become nought, that is, return to their original reality. When we sit facing the wall doing zazen, we realize that none of the thoughts that arise in our minds, as a result of karma, are real. The Buddha's fifty years of teaching are meaningless. The mistake comes from not knowing what the mind is. Musing that few indeed experience this agony, I entered the Buddha Hall and spent the night there, feeling more lonely than usual, and being unable to sleep. Towards dawn, I dozed off, and in my dream I went to the back of the temple, where many skeletons were assembled, each moving in his own special way just as they did in life. While I marveled at the sight, one of the skeletons approached me and said:

Memories
There are none:
When they depart,
All is a dream;
My life—how sad!

If Buddhism
Is divided into Gods
And Buddhas;
How can one enter

The Way of Truth?

For as long as you breathe
A mere breath of air,
A dead body
At the side of the road
Seems something apart from you.

Well, we enjoyed ourselves together, the skeleton and I, and that illusive mind which generally separates us from others gradually left me. The skeleton that had accompanied me all this while possessed the mind that renounces the world and seeks for truth. Dwelling on the watershed of things, he passed from shallow to deep, and made me realize the origin of my own mind. What was in my ears was the sighing of the wind in the pine trees; what shone in my eyes was the moon that enlightened my pillow.

But when is it not a dream? Who is not a skeleton? It is just because human beings are covered with skins of varying colors that sexual passion between men and women comes to exist. When the breathing stops and the skin of the body is broken there is no more form, no higher and lower. You must realize that what we now have and touch as we stand here is the skin covering our skeleton. Think deeply about this fact. High and low, young and old—there is no difference whatever between them. When we are enlightened concerning the One Great Causality we understand the meaning of unborn, undying.

If a stone
Can be the memento
Of the dead,
Then the tombstone
Would be better as a lavatory.

How dangerously foolish is the mind of man!

We have

One moon,
Clear and unclouded,
Yet are lost in the darkness
Of this fleeting world.

Think now, when your breath stops and the skin of your body breaks, you will also become like me. How long do you think you will live in this fleeting world?

To prove
His reign
Is eternal,
The Emperor has planted
The pine trees of Sumiyoshi.

Give up the idea “I exist.” Just let your body be blown along by the wind of the floating clouds; rely on this. To want to live forever is to wish for the impossible, the unreal, like the idea “I exist.”

This world
Is a dream
Seen while awake;
How pitiful those
Who see it and are shocked!

It is useless to pray to the gods about your destiny. Think only of the One Great Matter.⁴ Human beings are mortal; there is nothing to be shocked about.

If they can serve
To bring us to loathe them,
The troubles of this world
Are most welcome.

Why on earth

⁴ The matter of birth and death.

Do people decorate
This temporary manifestation,
When from the first they know
It will be like this?⁵

The body of a thing
Will return
To the Original Place.
Do not search,
Unnecessarily, elsewhere.

Not a single soul
Knows why he is born,
Or his real dwelling place;
We go back to our origin,
We become earth again.

Many indeed
The ways to climb
From the mountain foot,
But it is the same moon
That we see o'er the peak.

If I do not decide
The dwelling place
Of my future,
How is it possible
That I should lose my way?

Our real mind
Has no beginning,
No end;
Do not fancy

⁵ That is, like a skeleton.

That we are born, and die.

If you give rein to it,
The mind goes rampant!
It must be mastered
And the world itself rejected.

Rain, hail and snow,
Ice too, are set apart,
But when they fall,
The same water
Of the valley stream.

The ways of preaching
The Eternal Mind
May be different,
But all see the same
Heavenly truth.

Fill the path
With the fallen needles
Of the pine tree,
So that no one knows
If anyone lives there.

How vain
The funeral rites
At Mount Toribe!⁶
Those who speed the parting ghost
Can they themselves remain here forever?

Melancholy indeed
The burning smoke

⁶ Mount Toribe is a hill east of Kyoto where corpses were cremated. The words “the smoke of Toribeyama” occur frequently in older Japanese literature.

Of Mount Toribe!
How long shall I think of it
As another's pathos?

Vanity of vanities
The form of one
I saw this morning
Has become the smoky cloud
Of the evening sky.
Look, alas,
At the evening smoke
Of Mount Toribe!
Even it falls back and billows
With the rising of the wind.
It becomes ash when burned,
And earth when buried—
Could anything
Remain as evil?

With the sins
That I committed
Until I was three years old,
At last I also
Disappeared.

This is the way of the world. Realizing how foolish they are who, not knowing that all things are and must be temporary and transient, are baffled, someone this very day asked how we should live in this fleeting world. A certain man answered: "Quite different from past times, priests nowadays leave their temples. Formerly those who were religiously inclined entered the temples, but now they all shun them. The priests are devoid of wisdom; they find zazen boring. They don't concentrate on their kōan and are interested only in temple furniture. Their Zen meditation is

a mere matter of appearance; they are smug and wear their robes proudly, but are only ordinary people in priestly garments. Indeed, their robes are merely ropes binding them, their surplices like rods torturing them.”

When we think about recurrent life and death, we know that we fall into Hell by taking life; by being greedy we turn into hungry devils; ignorance causes us to be reborn as animals; anger makes us demons. By obeying the Five Commandments⁷ we come back to earth as men, and by performing the Ten Good Deeds⁸ we are resurrected in Heaven. Above these are the Four Wise Ones;⁹ together, they are called the Ten Worlds.¹⁰

When we see this One Thought,¹¹ there is no form, no dwelling place, no loathing, no rejecting. Like the clouds of the great sky, the foam on the water. As no thoughts arise there is no mind to create the myriad phenomena. The mind and things are one and the same. They do not know men’s doubts.

Parents may be compared to the flint and the steel used for making fire. The steel is the father, the stone is the mother, and the fire is the child. The fire is ignited with tinder material, and it will die out when the contributing causes of the fire, the wood and the oil, are exhausted. It is similar to this with the production of “fire” when father and mother make love together.

Since father and mother are beginningless too, they decline finally to a mind of burnt-out passion. In vain are all things of this world brought up from emptiness and manifested into all forms. Since it is freed of all forms, it is called the “Original Field.” All the forms, of plants and grasses, states and lands, issue invariably from emptiness, so we use a metaphorical

⁷ Not to take life, steal, commit adultery, tell lies, drink intoxicants.

⁸ This includes obeying the first four of the Five Commandments and in addition the bans on immoral language, slander, equivocation, covetousness, anger, and false views.

⁹ The four kinds of holy men: *sravakas*, *pratyeka-buddhas*, *bodhisattvas*, and *buddhas*.

¹⁰ The Ten Worlds or states of existence: the states of the Four Wise Ones together with the Six Ways of sentient existence previously mentioned: of the Hell-dwellers, hungry ghosts, animals, demons, men, and heavenly beings (*Devas*).

¹¹ Each thought-instant is said to encompass all the Ten Worlds in their totality.

figure and speak of the Original Field.

If you break open
The cherry tree,
There is not a single flower.
But the skies of spring
Bring forth the blossoms!
Though it has no bridge,
The cloud climbs up to heaven;
It does not seek the aid
Of Gautama's sutras.

When you listen to Gautama's preaching of more than fifty years, and practice exactly as Gautama preached, it is just as he taught at his last preaching when he said, "From beginning to end I have preached not a single word," and held out a flower, bringing a faint smile to Kasyapa's lips. At that time he told Kasyapa: "I have the exquisite mind of the right Dharma, and with it I acknowledge your understanding of the flower." When asked what he meant, Gautama said, "My preaching of the Dharma for more than fifty years may be likened to saying there is something in your hand in order to bring near a small child you want to take in your arms. My fifty years and more of Dharma-preaching have been like a beckoning to Kasyapa. That is why the Dharma I transmit is like the taking up of a child to my breast."

Yet this flower is not to be known by bodily means. Nor is it in the mind. It cannot be known even though we speak of it. We must fully understand this present mind and body. Even though one may be called knowledgeable, he cannot therefore be called a man of the Buddhist Dharma. The Dharma Flower of the One Vehicle,¹² in which all Buddhas of past, present, and future have appeared in this world, is this flower. Since the time of the twenty-eight Indian and six Chinese Patriarchs there

¹² I.e., the Mahayana teaching.

has never been anything in the world apart from the Original Field. As all things of the world are beginningless they are said to be Great. All of the eight consciousnesses¹³ appear from emptiness. Yet the flowers of spring and the plants and grasses of summer, autumn, and winter come from emptiness too. Again, there are Four Great Elements:¹⁴ Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind (Air), though people are ignorant of this fact. Breath is wind; fire is what makes us hot; water a vital liquid that makes us wet; when we are buried or burned, we become earth. Because these too are beginningless, none of them ever abides.

In this world
Where everything, without exception,
Is unreal,
Death also
Is devoid of reality.

To the eye of illusion it appears that though the body dies, the soul does not. This is a terrible mistake. The enlightened man declares that both perish together. Buddha also is an emptiness. Sky and earth all return to the Original Field. All the sutras and the eighty thousand dharmas are to be chucked away. Become enlightened by these words of mine and become a man of ease and leisure! But:

To write something and leave it behind us,
It is but a dream.
When we awake we know
There is not even anyone to read it.

The 8th day of the 4th month, the 3rd year of Kōshō (1457)
Ikkyū-shi Sōjun, formerly of Daitokuji, Tōkai.

¹³ In Sanskrit, *viññāna*, or the eight consciousnesses all sentient beings possess: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and three different operations of the mind.

¹⁴ The Four Elements (*shidai*) said to constitute all matter.

Seventh generation from Kidō¹⁵

¹⁵ Kidō is the Chinese Zen master Kidō Chigu (Hsü-t'ang Chih-yü, 1185–1269), the master of Daiō Kokushi (1235–1309), the founder of the main Japanese Rinzai line. Ikkyū's colophons often contain references to him. Tōkai refers to Japan. The final page of the Ryukoku edition contains a head-and-shoulders image of Bodhidharma, with an accompanying *dōka*: Even doing nine years of zazen/Becomes hellish—/This body that becomes/The Earth of Emptiness.