

“Baizhang’s Fox” – from everydayzen.org (Zoketsu Norman Fischer)

Once when Hyakujo (Baizhang) delivered some Zen lectures an old man attended, unseen by the monks. At the end of each talk when the monks left so did he.

But one day he remained after they had gone, and Hyakujo asked him: ‘Who are you?’ The old man replied: ‘I am not a human being, but I was a human being when the Kashapa Buddha preached in this world. I was a Zen master and was abbot of this mountain. At that time one of my students asked me whether the enlightened person is subject to the law of causation. I answered him: “The enlightened person is not subject to the law of causation.” For this answer I became a fox for five hundred rebirths, and I am still a fox.

‘Will you save me from this condition with your Zen words and let me get out of a fox’s body? Now may I ask you: Is the enlightened person subject to the law of causation?’ Hyakujo said: ‘The enlightened person is not blind to the law of causation.’ At the words of Hyakujo the old man was enlightened. ‘I am emancipated,’ he said, paying homage with a deep bow. ‘I am no more a fox, but I have to leave my fox body in my dwelling place behind this mountain. Please perform a monk’s funeral for it.’ Then he disappeared.

The next day Hyakujo gave an order through the chief monk to prepare for the funeral of a monk. ‘No one is sick in the infirmary,’ wondered the monks. ‘What does our teacher mean?’ After dinner Hyakujo led the monks out and around the mountain. In a cave, with his staff he poked out the corpse of an old fox and then performed the cremation ceremony. That evening Hyakujo gave a talk to the monks and told this story about the law of causation.

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Blue Cliff Record, Case 4: Te Shan Carrying His Bundle – Talk 2 (excerpt)

May 18, 1980 Dharma Talk by Dainin Katagiri Roshi

1:12:07

Question: I’d like to know [why the] the monk turned into a fox... [...]

Katagiri: Well, it doesn’t matter whether it is a fox, or a rabbit, or tree. I think in China and Japan the fox was believed to be a sort of magical animal, with the power to change its figure into a beautiful woman or boy to cheat human beings. That is a fox, the Japanese people or the Chinese believed.

Different person: But was it a punishment or [...]

Katagiri: It’s not punishment. Apparently it seems to be punishment, but that’s not a deep understanding. *Wild fox* means you have to return to the human world, the dualistic world. Day by day, when spring comes you have to be in spring, when winter comes you have to be you in winter. That means that you have to change, constantly. But this change is not change, [it is] fitting into reality, instead of staying at the high level of spirituality, where there is no dualistic

world. If we [stay] there, we always create some problems. But when [summer] comes, you take off the winter clothes, you cannot wear winter clothes in the summer. So you have to accommodate yourself to the [each] moment, but with open [eyes]. That is the fox.

Different person: But he was asked a question, and then he gave an answer and he was turned into [a fox].

Katagiri: Right. “Not fall into causation”; that was the answer at that time.

Same person: [So] he gave the wrong answer.

Katagiri: Well, it’s not the right answer, but on the other hand, “not fall into causation” is also right, in a sense, because you cannot always take care of [life] just according to the law of causation. If you take care of your life just according to causation, you cannot move an inch in the realm of causation, you cannot find freedom there. So in order to be free, you have to be free from causation, sooner or later. So “not fall into causation” is freedom from causation. But what is freedom from causation? It doesn’t mean to *ignore* [causation]. So intellectually, it’s [suggesting that] basically you have to be right in the middle of the bullseye of life, constant change – what is the real meaning of death, what is the real process of life or death. You have to be there. And *then* look at the human world, flashing lights – white flashing light or red flashing light – that is causation, or freedom [from] causation, or not freedom [from] causation, always there – [ideas]. And then this old monk picked up one; that’s why on the other hand he forgot this. It’s not punishment, but in the story he didn’t say the *other* aspect, so that’s why he became a “wild fox” – that means even though he forgot and he picked up one, well his life is what? His life has to go back to the dualistic world. When the spring comes, he has to be. When the winter comes, he has to be. So that is *wild fox*. And “for 500 years” means century after century all humans beings do this in that way.

And then, after that, the wild fox asks Hyakujo (Baizhang), “Please give me a suggestion, a pithy remark, in order [for me] to be free from [being a] fox.” And so [Hyakujo] says, “Not ignoring causation.” And then, he [was released.] So that is a flashing light. And then, he can accept *both* flashing lights. That means he awakens where he is, right in the middle of samsara. But if he picks up one, he cannot stay right in the middle of samsara; he attaches to something.

So we have to see [the] flashing lights. But where you are is right in the middle of life or death; this is the basic nature of human being. Even though you don’t know, that is the place where you are. So that’s why Hyakujo shows the other side.

And then [the wild fox] realizes, “Oh, yes.” That means he awakened to where he is. And then he says, “Please perform a funeral service for me.” That means freedom.

This story is really dramatic. [*He laughs.*] Well, that koan is pretty hard for many monks to try to understand [through] the practice, again and again. But if you understand the basic teaching, the way of understanding Buddhism, it’s not difficult. [It’s easy.]

Diamond Sutra: Provisional Being (excerpt)

July 25, 1979 Dharma Talk by Dainin Katagiri Roshi

35:50

You know the idea of empathy, according to psychology? You are projecting yourself into the tree; at that time, the tree becomes you. So if you want to talk with the tree, you have to project yourself into the tree. At that time, the tree speaks to you. This is very natural.

For instance, if you feel melancholy, pensive, at that time the surrounding environment becomes completely melancholy. Whatever I tell you, you don't accept, you don't understand. If you feel sad, everything becomes sad. When it rains, the whole world becomes melancholy. Go up above the clouds with an airplane, and it's shiny, but rain – it's rain. You don't feel good, because we believe the whole world seems to be melancholy. This means we can move initiatively to the object, creating our world. In other words, the world doesn't exist alone; the world always exists connected with subject, in many ways.

But we cannot always believe in that way. For instance, even though you feel melancholy, if you see the beautiful morning sun rising – you feel good! Don't you think so? Wonderful. So we do not always create our environment by our feelings; sometimes, the object creates you. Even though you feel sad, if you see the morning sun rising, you feel great! You feel how beautiful it is.

According to [the psychological concept of] empathy, that understanding is a mistake, a misunderstanding, because if the morning sun rising makes you happy, at that time you believe the morning sun rising has a mind, as well as your mind. According to empathy in psychology, this is a misunderstanding, this is a delusion, because you project yourself into the morning sun and then you believe that it seems to have a mind, but actually it is the morning sun, apart from you. That is the psychological understanding, but that is a misunderstanding broadly speaking, because we are distinguishing between subject and object. If you always see or accept subject and object separately, there is not a warm feeling of the world, there is not a feeling of warmth communicating between the subject and object.

So an important point is, if you see the morning sun and the morning sun makes you happy, at that time – whatever you think intellectually – morning sun has mind, has a feeling. That feeling is completely universal. That feeling is something through which we can have spiritual rapport between the morning sun and you. Psychologically, this is *universal consciousness*, or according to Buddhism, that is [Buddha Nature](#). So, the morning sun, the subject, trees, all sentient beings, have feeling, universal feeling, as well as we have. That's why we can communicate with each other.

So, the object is not always something giving a sense of resistance or antagonism. The object is wonderful; the object is a being which exists in a huge universal vision.

For instance, you exist in that way because when you were born, your mother took care of you. The mother is your object. If you believe the mother is your object, at that time that object is consciously or unconsciously giving a certain sense of resistance. "Oh, my mother is [so bossy]. I don't like it." But baby? He doesn't care. For baby, the mother is *huge*: a big tree, by which he is supported in a broad sense.

So you should accept your object, by which you are supported constantly, not giving a sense of resistance, or a sort of antagonism. That's why object and subject are always communicating, interconnected.

43:50

I think you understand why we believe things to be actual beings, not provisional beings. I explained it to you: because, by participation in your object, at that time, the object as a provisional being turns into an actual being. So that means there is always a sense of actuality.

This sense of actuality comes from very common human activity. But if you take away this sense of actuality, there are two kinds of thinking. One is recognition, the function of cognition. The other is [aesthetic contemplation](#).

[With] the function of recognition or cognition, you don't [engage with the] object, you completely keep away from it. You see the object objectively. So, there is no feeling of warmth. Completely you see the object and then try to understand [*unintelligible*] of your object. This is [science].

On the other hand, the function of aesthetic contemplation is through your consciousness. You don't participate in the object, but through consciousness, through the aesthetic contemplation, you can merge yourself into the object, exactly. Aesthetic contemplation means, in other words, intuition. Or, a particular term is *wisdom*. You don't participate in your object, but, through wisdom, you can merge yourself into your object pretty deeply. This is the function of aesthetic contemplation.

[Tape change.]

... [Aesthetic contemplation] is kind of a religious way of understanding, but aesthetic contemplation is still in the realm of philosophy or psychology, the philosophical or metaphysical realm. Religiously, particularly in [Buddhism](#), we participate practically, directly, with our body. But, you participate in your object with wisdom. At that time, the activity of participation in your object becomes very pure; [there is] a sense of purity, undefiled practice, because you merge yourself into your object with your wisdom. You don't participate in the object carelessly; you don't participate at random. You participate in it very carefully, with wisdom. You merge yourself into your object. So, even though you participate, this participation is not *defiled* participation or human activity. This is *undefiled* human activity. So this is religious activity.