

matter. Any wise man who claps eyes on them is sure to fling them to the ground in disgust and spew them contemptuously with spit.

My literary labors: *Poison Stamens in a Thicket of Thorns; Lingering Light from Precious Mirror; Idle Talk on a Night Boat; My Teakettle; A Weed-Choked Field of Words; Goose Grass; Tea-Grinding Song; A Record of Four Filial Young Girls; A Childhood Tale; Yuki's Tale; Dream Words from the Land of Dreams; Tosen-shiki; An Application of Moxa; Snake Strawberries; The Record of Senai's Comments on the Cold Mountain Poems; Horse Thistles; Dharma Talks Introductory to Lectures on the Record of Hsi-keng; Wild Ivy.* Only a rough list, but when you're as old and forgetful as I am, you can't be expected to remember everything.<sup>40</sup>

A layman spoke up: "What a great stroke of luck it is in this degenerate latter day to be blessed with the essentials of so true and genuine a Dharma. One can expect to encounter such favorable karmic fortune only once in many rebirths. I look forward with keen anticipation to hearing something more about Intropective Meditation."

"Fine," I told him. "I like to see students who are eager to ask questions. But when I do a lot of talking like this it always tires me out. Come back tomorrow and ask me again."<sup>41</sup>

The layman pressed his palms together, bowed deeply, and was gone.

## 4

*Zen Sickness*

**I**ONG AGO, Wu Chi-ch'u told Master Shih-f'ai: "In order to refine the elixir, it is necessary to gather the vital energy.<sup>2</sup> To gather the vital energy, it is necessary to focus the mind. When the mind focuses in the ocean of vital energy or field of elixir located an inch below the navel, the vital energy gathers there. When the vital energy gathers in the elixir field, the elixir is produced. When the elixir is produced, the physical frame is strong and firm. When the physical frame is strong and firm, the spirit is full and replete. When the spirit is full and replete, long life is assured."

These are words of true wisdom.

The layman came again the next morning and repeated the request he had made the previous day:<sup>3</sup>

"Very well," I said, "I will explain to you the essentials of Intropective Meditation."

On the day I first committed myself to a life of Zen practice, I pledged to summon all the faith and courage at my command and dedicate myself with steadfast resolve to the pursuit of the Buddha Way. I embarked on a regimen of rigorous austerities, which I continued for several years, pushing myself relentlessly.

Then one night, everything suddenly fell away, and I crossed the threshold into enlightenment. All the doubts and uncertainties that had burdened me all those years suddenly vanished, roots

and all—just like melted ice. Deep-rooted karma that had bound me for endless kalpas to the cycle of birth-and-death vanished like foam on the water.

It's true, I thought to myself: the Way is not far from man.<sup>4</sup>

Those stories about the ancient masters taking twenty or even thirty years to attain it—someone must have made them all up. For the next several months, I was waltzing on air, flagging my arms and stamping my feet in a kind of witless rapture.

Afterward, however, as I began reflecting upon my everyday behavior, I could see that the two aspects of my life—the active and the meditative—were totally out of balance. No matter what I was doing, I never felt free or completely at ease. I realized I would have to rekindle a fearless resolve and once again throw myself life and limb together into the Dharma struggle. With my teeth clenched tightly and eyes focused straight ahead, I began devoting myself single-mindedly to my practice, forsaking food and sleep altogether.

Before the month was out, my heart fire began to rise upward against the natural course, parching my lungs of their essential fluids.<sup>5</sup> My feet and legs were always ice-cold: they felt as though they were immersed in tubs of snow. There was a constant buzzing in my ears, as if I were walking beside a raging mountain torrent. I became abnormally weak and timid, shrinking and fearful in whatever I did. I felt totally drained, physically and mentally exhausted. Strange visions appeared to me during waking and sleeping hours alike. My armpits were always wet with perspiration. My eyes watered constantly. I traveled far and wide, visiting wise Zen teachers, seeking out noted physicians. But none of the remedies they offered brought me any relief.

#### MASTER HAKUYŪ

Then I happened to meet someone who told me about a hermit named Master Hakuyū, who lived inside a cave high in the

mountains of the Shirakawa District of Kyoto. He was reputed to be three hundred and seventy years old. His cave dwelling was two or three leagues from any human habitation. He didn't like seeing people, and whenever someone approached, he would run off and hide. From the look of him, it was hard to tell whether he was a man of great wisdom or merely a fool, but the people in the surrounding villages venerated him as a sage. Rumor had it he had been the teacher of Ishikawa Jozan<sup>6</sup> and that he was well versed in astrology and deeply learned in the medical arts as well. People who had approached him and requested his teaching in the proper manner, observing the proprieties, had on rare occasions been known to elicit a remark or two of enigmatic import from him. After leaving and giving the words deeper thought, the people would generally discover them to be very beneficial.

In the middle of the first month in the seventh year of the Hōei era [1710],<sup>7</sup> I shouldered my travel pack, slipped quietly out of the temple in eastern Mino where I was staying, and headed for Kyoto. On reaching the capital, I bent my steps northward, crossing over the hills at Black Valley [Kurodani] and making my way to the small hamlet at White River [Shirakawa]. I dropped my pack off at a teahouse and went to make inquiries about Master Hakuyū's cave. One of the villagers pointed his finger toward a thin thread of rushing water high above in the hills.

Using the sound of the water as my guide, I struck up into the mountains, hiking on until I came to the stream. I made my way along the bank for another league or so until the stream and the trail both petered out. There was not so much as a woodcutters' trail to indicate the way. At this point, I lost my bearings completely and was unable to proceed another step. Not knowing what else to do, I sat down on a nearby rock, closed my eyes, placed my palms before me in *gasshō*, and began chanting a sutra. Presently, as if by magic, I heard in the distance the faint sounds of someone chopping at a tree. After pushing my way deeper

through the forest trees in the direction of the sound, I spotted a woodcutter. He directed my gaze far above to a distant site among the swirling clouds and mist at the crest of the mountains. I could just make out a small yellowish patch, not more than an inch square, appearing and disappearing in the eddying mountain vapors. He told me it was a rushwork blind that hung over the entrance to Master Hakyū's cave. Hitching the bottom of my robe up into my sash, I began the final ascent to Hakyū's dwelling. Clambering over jagged rocks, pushing through heavy vines and clinging underbrush, the snow and frost gnawed into my straw sandals, the damp clouds thrust against my robe. It was very hard going, and by the time I reached the spot where I had seen the blind, I was covered with a thick, oily sweat.

I now stood at the entrance to the cave. It commanded a prospect of unsurpassed beauty, completely above the vulgar dust of the world. My heart trembling with fear, my skin prickling with gooseflesh, I leaned against some rocks for a while and counted out several hundred breaths.

After shaking off the dirt and dust and straightening my robe to make myself presentable, I bowed down, hesitantly pushed the blind aside, and peered into the cave. I could make out the figure of Master Hakyū in the darkness. He was sitting perfectly erect, his eyes shut. A wonderful head of black hair flecked with bits of white reached down over his knees. He had a fine, youthful complexion, ruddy in hue like a Chinese date. He was seated on a soft mat made of grasses and wore a large jacket of coarsely woven cloth. The interior of the cave was small, not more than five feet square, and, except for a small desk, there was no sign of household articles or other furnishings of any kind. On top of the desk, I could see three scrolls of writing—*The Doctrine of the Mean*, *Lao Tzu*, and the *Diamond Sutra*.<sup>8</sup>

I introduced myself as politely as I could, explained the

symptoms and causes of my illness in some detail, and appealed to the master for his help.

#### CURE

After a while, Hakyū opened his eyes and gave me a good hard look. Then, speaking slowly and deliberately, he explained that he was only a useless, worn-out old man—"more dead than alive." He dwelled among these mountains living on such nuts and wild mountain fruit as he could gather. He passed the nights together with the mountain deer and other wild creatures. He professed to be completely ignorant of anything else and said he was acutely embarrassed that such an important Buddhist priest had made a long trip expressly to see him.

But I persisted, begging repeatedly for his help. At last, he reached out with an easy, almost offhand gesture and grasped my hand. He proceeded to examine my five bodily organs, taking my pulses at nine vital points. His fingernails, I noticed, were almost an inch long.

Furrowing his brow, he said with a voice tinged with pity, "Not much can be done. You have developed a serious illness. By pushing yourself too hard, you forgot the cardinal rule of religious training. You are suffering from meditation sickness, which is extremely difficult to cure by medical means. If you attempt to treat it by using acupuncture, moxicaustery, or medicines, you will find they have no effect—not even if they were administered by a P'ien Ch'iao, T's'ang Kung, or Hua T'o.<sup>9</sup> You came to this grievous pass as a result of meditation. You will never regain your health unless you are able to master the techniques of Introspective Meditation. Just as the old saying goes, 'When a person falls to the earth, it is from the earth that he must raise himself up.'<sup>10</sup>

"Please," I said, "teach me the secret technique of Introspective

Meditation. I want to begin practicing it, and learn how it's done."

With a demeanor that was now solemn and majestic, Master Hakyū softly and quietly replied, "Ah, you are determined to find an answer to your problem, aren't you, young man? All right, I suppose I can tell you a few things about Introspective Meditation that I learned many years ago. It is a secret method for sustaining life known to very few people. Practiced diligently, it is sure to yield remarkable results. It will enable you to look forward to a long life as well."<sup>11</sup>

"The Great Way is divided into the two instruments of yin and yang. Combining, they produce human beings and all other things. A primal inborn energy circulates silently through the body, moving along channels or conduits from one to another of the five great organs. Defensive energy and nutritive blood, which circulate together, ascend and descend throughout the body, making fifty complete circulations in each twenty-four-hour period."<sup>12</sup>

"The lungs, manifesting the metal principle, are a female organ located above the diaphragm. The liver, manifesting the wood principle, is a male organ located beneath the diaphragm. The heart, manifesting the fire principle, is the major yang organ; it is located in the upper body. The kidneys, manifesting the water principle, are the major yin organ; they are located in the lower body. Contained within the five internal organs are seven marvelous powers, with the spleen and kidneys having two each."<sup>13</sup>

"The exhaled breath issues from the heart and the lungs; the inhaled breath enters through the kidneys and liver. With each exhalation of breath, the defensive energy and nutritive blood move forward three inches in their conduits; they also advance three inches with each inhalation of breath. Every twenty-four hours, the defensive energy and nutritive blood make fifty complete circulations of the body.

"Fire is by nature light and unsteady and always wants to mount upward, whereas water is by nature heavy and settled and always wants to sink downward. If a person ignorant of this principle strives too hard in his meditative practices, the fire in his heart will rush violently upward, scorching his lungs and impairing their function.

"Since a mother-and-child relationship obtains between the lungs, representing the metal principle, and the kidneys, representing the water principle, when the lungs are afflicted and distressed, the kidneys are also weakened and debilitated. Debilitation of the lungs and kidneys saps and enfeebles the other organs and disrupts the proper balance within the six viscera.<sup>14</sup> This results in an imbalance in the function of the body's four constituent elements (earth, water, fire, wind), some of which grow too strong and some too weak. This leads, in turn, to a great variety of ailments and disorders in each of the four elements. Medicines have no effect in treating them. Physicians can only look on with folded arms."

#### SUSTAINING LIFE

[Master Hakyū continued:] "Sustaining life is much like protecting a country. Whereas a wise lord and sage ruler always thinks of the common people under him, a foolish lord and mediocre ruler concerns himself exclusively with the pastimes of the upper classes. When a ruler becomes engrossed in his own selfish interests, his nine ministers vaunt their power and authority, the officials under them seek special favors, and none of them gives a thought to the poverty and suffering of the people below them. The countryside is filled with pale, gaunt faces; famine stalks the land, leaving the streets of the towns and cities littered with corpses. The wise and the good retreat into hiding, the common

people burn with resentment and anger, the provincial lords grow rebellious, and the enemies on the borders rise to the attack. The people are plunged into an agony of grief and suffering until, finally, the nation itself ceases to exist.

"On the other hand, when the ruler turns his attention below, focusing on the common people, his ministers and officials perform their duties simply and frugally, the hardships and suffering of the common people always in their thoughts. As a result, the farmers produce an abundance of food, their wives an abundance of cloth. The good and the wise gather to the ruler to render him service, the provincial lords are respectful and submissive, the common people prosper, and the country grows strong. Each person is obedient to his superior, no enemies threaten the borders, and the sounds of battle are no longer heard in the land. The names of the weapons of war themselves come to be forgotten.

"It is the same with the human body. The person who has arrived at attainment always keeps the heart's vital energy below, filling the lower body. When the lower body is filled with the heart's vital energy, there is nowhere within for the seven mistfuntunes to operate<sup>15</sup> and nowhere without for the four evils<sup>16</sup> to gain an entrance. The defensive energy and nutritive blood are replete, the heart and mind vigorous and healthy. The lips never know the bitterness of medical potions; the body never feels the discomfort of the acupuncture needle or moxa treatments.

"An average or mediocre person always allows the heart's vital energy to rise up unchecked so it diffuses throughout the upper body. When the heart's vital energy is allowed to rise unchecked, the heat emanating from the heart on the left side damages the lungs on the right. This puts a strain on the five senses, diminishing their working, and causes harmful disturbances in the six roots.<sup>17</sup>

"Because of this, Chuang Tzu said, 'The True Person

breathes from his heels. The ordinary person breathes from his throat.'

"Hsü Chun said, 'When the vital energy is in the lower heater, the breaths are long; when the vital energy is in the upper heater, the breaths are short.'<sup>18</sup>

"Master Shang Yang said,<sup>19</sup> 'There is a single genuine vital energy in man. Its descent into the lower heater signifies the return of the single yang. If a person wants to experience the occasion when the yin reaches completion and yields to returning yang, his proof will be found in the warmth that is generated when the vital energy is concentrated in the lower body.'

"The golden rule in the art of sustaining life is always to keep the upper body cool and the lower body warm.

"There are twelve conduits along which the defensive energy and nutritive blood circulate through the body.<sup>20</sup> These conduits correspond to the twelve horary signs or stems, to the twelve months of the year, and to the twelve hours of the day. They also correspond to the various permutations the hexagrams or divination signs in the *Book of Changes* undergo in the course of their yearly cycle.

"Five yin lines above and one yang line below—the hexagram known as 'Ground Thunder Returns'—corresponds seasonally to the winter solstice. It is perhaps this Chuang Tzu refers to when he speaks of 'the True Person breathing from his heels.'

"Three yang lines below and three yin lines above—the hexagram 'Earth and Heaven at Peace'—corresponds seasonally to the first month, when the ten thousand things are pregnant with the vital energy of generation and the myriad buds and flowers, receiving the beneficial moisture, burst into blossom. It is the configuration of the True Person, whose lower body is filled with primal energy. When a person achieves this stage, his defensive energy and nutritive blood are replenished and his spirit is full of vigor and courage.

"Five yin lines below and one yang line above—the hexagram known as 'Splitting Apart'—corresponds seasonally to the ninth month. When the heavens are at this point, foliage in the garden and forest drains of color, flowers droop and wither. It is the configuration of the 'ordinary man breathing from his throat.' When a person reaches this stage, he is thin and haggard in appearance; his teeth grow loose and fall.

"Because of this, the *Treatise on Prolonging Life* states:<sup>21</sup> 'When all six yang lines are exhausted and man is wholly yin, death may easily occur.' What you must know is that, for sustaining life, the key is to have primal energy constantly filling the lower body."

#### REMEDIES FOR SUSTAINING LIFE AND ACHIEVING IMMORTALITY

[Master Hakuyū continued:] "Before Wu Ch'i-ch'u visited Master Shih-t'ai long ago,<sup>22</sup> he prepared himself by performing ritual purifications. Then he went and inquired about the art of refining the elixir. Master Shih-t'ai told him, 'I possess a marvelous secret for producing the genuine and profound elixir, but only a person of superior capacity would be able to receive and transmit it.' This is the very same secret the Yellow Emperor was given by Master Kuang Ch'eng. The Yellow Emperor received it only after he had completed a retirement and abstinence of twenty-one days.<sup>23</sup>

"The genuine elixir does not exist apart from the Great Way; the Great Way does not exist apart from the genuine elixir. You Buddhists have a teaching known as the five nonleakages.<sup>24</sup> Once the six desires are dispelled and the working of the five senses is forgotten, the primal, undifferentiated energy will gather to repletion under your very eyes. This is what T'ai-pai Tao-jen

meant when he spoke about 'combining one's vital inborn energy with the primal energy of heaven and earth whence it derives.'<sup>25</sup>

"You should draw what Mencius called the 'vast, expansive energy' down and store it in the elixir field—the reservoir of vital energy located below the navel.<sup>26</sup> Hold it there over the months and years, preserving it single-mindedly, sustaining it without wavering. One morning, you will suddenly overturn the elixir furnace, and then everywhere, within and without the entire universe, will become a single immense piece of pure elixir.<sup>27</sup>

"When that happens, you will realize for the first time that you yourself are a genuine sage, as unborn as heaven and earth, as undying as empty space. At that moment, your efforts to refine the elixir will attain fruition. This is not a superficial feat such as raising winds or riding mists, shrinking space, or walking over water, the kind of thing that can be performed by lesser sages. For you, the object is to churn the great sea into finest butter, to transform the great earth into purest gold.<sup>28</sup>

"In explaining the phrase 'the metal liquid returns to the elixir,' a wise man of the past said, "Elixir" refers to the elixir field, and "liquid" refers to the blood fluid in the lungs, so the phrase means that the blood in the lungs returns to the elixir field located below the navel."<sup>29</sup>

#### DRAWING THE MIND INTO THE LOWER BODY

At this point, I [Hakuin] said to Master Hakuyū: "I am deeply grateful for your instruction. I'm going to discontinue my Zen study for a while so that I can concentrate my efforts on Intropective Meditation and cure my illness.

"There is something that still bothers me, however. Wouldn't the method you teach be an example of 'overly emphasizing cooling remedies in order to bring the heart-fire down,'

which the great physician Li Shih-ts'ai warned against?<sup>30</sup> And if I concentrated my mind in a single place, wouldn't that impede the movement of defensive energy and nutritive blood and make them stagnate?"

A flicker of a smile crossed Master Hakyu's face. "Not at all," he replied. "You mustn't forget that Master Li also said the nature of fire is to flame upward, so it must be made to descend; the nature of water is to flow downward, so it must be made to rise. This condition of fire descending and water ascending is called intermingling. The time when intermingling is taking place is called Already Completed; the time when it is not taking place is called Before Completion.<sup>31</sup>

"Intermingling is a configuration of life. Not intermingling is a configuration of death. When Master Li and those of his school speak of 'overly emphasizing cooling remedies to bring down the heart-fire,' they do so in order to save people who study the teachings of the Tan-hsi school from the harm that could result from over-emphasizing such remedies.<sup>32</sup>

"Fire functions in two ways: as prince and as minister. The princely fire is found in the upper body; it presides in tranquillity. The ministerial fire is found in the lower body; it presides in activity. Princely fire is master of the heart. Ministerial fire works as its subordinate.

"Ministerial fire is of two kinds, one of which is found in the kidneys, the other in the liver. The kidneys correspond to the dragon, the liver to thunder. There is a saying: 'The crash of thunder is never heard as long as the dragon stays hidden in the depths of the sea. The dragon never soars in the skies as long as thunder remains confined to the marshes and bogs.' Assuming that is true, and in view of the fact that the composition of both seas and marshes is water, doesn't the saying signify that the ministerial fire's tendency to rise is suppressed?"

"It is also said that the heart becomes exhausted [of energy]

when it tires and thus overheats. When the heart is exhausted, it can be replenished by making it descend below and intermingle with the kidneys. This is known as replenishing. It corresponds to the principle of After Completion mentioned before.

"You, young man, developed this grave illness because the fire in your heart was allowed to rush upward against the natural flow. Unless you succeed in bringing your heart down into your lower body, you will never regain your health, not even if you master all the secret practices the three worlds have to offer.<sup>33</sup>

"You probably regard me as some kind of Taoist. You probably think what I've been telling you has no relation to Buddhism at all. But that's mistaken. What I'm teaching you is Zen. If, in the future, you get a glimpse of true awakening, you will smile as you recall these words of mine."

#### NONCONTEMPLATION

[Master Hakyu continued:] "As for the practice of contemplation, true contemplation is noncontemplation. False contemplation is contemplation that is diverse and unfocused.<sup>34</sup> You contracted this grave illness by engaging in diverse contemplation. Don't you think that now you should save yourself by means of noncontemplation? If you take the heat in your heart, the fire in your mind, and draw it down into the region of the elixir field and the soles of the feet, you will feel naturally cool and refreshed. All discrimination will cease. Not the slightest conscious thought will occur to raise the waves of emotion. This is true meditation—pure and undefiled meditation.

"So don't talk about discontinuing your study of Zen. The Buddha himself taught that we should 'cure all kinds of illness by putting the heart down into the soles of the feet.' The Agama

sutras teach a method in which butter is used. It is unexcelled for treating debilitation of the heart.<sup>35</sup>

"In the Tendai sect's *Great Concentration and Insight*, the fundamental causes of illness as well as the methods of treating them are set forth in minute detail.<sup>36</sup> Twelve breathing techniques are given that are effective in curing a wide range of ailments. There is another technique of visualizing the heart as a bean resting on the navel. Ultimately, the essence in all these methods is to bring the heart-fire down and gather it in the elixir field and the soles of the feet. It is not only effective for curing illness, it is extremely beneficial for Zen meditation as well.

"There are, I believe, two kinds of concentration: concentration on ultimate truth and concentration on temporary truth.<sup>37</sup> The former is a full and perfect meditation on the true aspect of all things; in the latter, primary importance is placed on focusing the heart-energy in the region of the elixir field. Students who practice these concentrations derive great benefit from them."

#### CULTIVATING THE MIND ENERGY

[Master Hakuin continued:] "Dogen, founding patriarch of the Eihei-ji temple, traveled to China and studied with Zen master Ju-ching at T'ien-t'ung monastery.<sup>38</sup> One day, when he went to Ju-ching's chambers to receive his instruction, Ju-ching said, 'When you practice zazen, you should place your mind in the palm of your left hand.'

"This generally corresponds to the Tendai sect's concentration on temporary truth.

"In his *Smaller Concentration and Insight*, Chih-i relates how he first came to teach the secret technique of Introspective Meditation (concentration on temporary truth) and how by using it he saved his elder brother, gravely ill, from the brink of death.<sup>39</sup>

"The priest Po-yün said, 'I always keep my heart down filling

my lower belly. I use it all the time—teaching students, guiding the assembly of monks, receiving visitors, during encounters in my chambers, while busily engaged in talks and lectures of various kinds—and I never use it up. Since reaching old age, I've found its benefits to be especially great."<sup>40</sup>

"How commendable! Don't Po-yün's words agree with the teaching found in the *Su-wei?*: 'If you are tranquil and free of troubling thoughts, the primal energy will conform. As long as you preserve that energy within, there is no place for illness to enter.'<sup>41</sup>

"Moreover, the essence of preserving the energy within is to keep it replete and secure throughout the entire body—extending to all the three hundred and sixty joints and each of the eighty-four thousand pores of the skin. You must know that this is the ultimate secret of sustaining life.

"P'eng Tsu said, 'Close yourself up in a room where you won't be disturbed. Prepare a mat with bedding that has been warmed and a pillow about three inches high. Lie face upward with your body completely straight. Close your eyes and confine the heart-energy within your breast. Place a goose feather on your nose. When your breathing does not disturb the feather, count three hundred breaths. Once you have reached a state where your ears do not hear and your eyes do not see, cold and heat will no longer discomfort you; the poisonous stings of bees and scorpions will be unable to harm you. Upon attaining the age of three hundred and sixty, you will be very close to becoming a true person.'<sup>42</sup>

"Su Tung-p'o gave the following advice: 'If you are hungry, eat some food, but stop eating before you are full.<sup>43</sup> Take a long, leisurely stroll, until you feel your appetite return, then enter a quiet room and seat yourself in an upright posture. Begin exhaling and inhaling, counting your breaths—from ten to a hundred, from a hundred to a thousand. By the time you have counted a thousand breaths, your body should be as firm and steady as a rock, your heart as tranquil and motionless as the empty sky.'



"If you continue to sit like this for a long period, your breath will hang suspended. You will no longer inhale or exhale. Your breath will exude in clouds, rise up like mist, from the eighty-four thousand pores of your skin. You will realize with perfect clarity that all the illnesses you have suffered from, each of the countless disorders you have experienced from the beginningless beginning, have all vanished of themselves. You will be like a blind man suddenly regaining his sight who no longer has need to ask others for guidance on his way.

"What you must do is to cut back on words and devote yourself solely to sustaining your primal energy. Hence, it is said, "Those who wish to strengthen their sight keep their eyes closed. Those who wish to strengthen their hearing avoid sounds. Those who wish to sustain their heart-energy maintain silence.""<sup>44</sup>

#### THE SOFT-BUTTER METHOD

"You mentioned a method in which butter is used," I [Hakuin] said. "May I ask you about that?"<sup>45</sup>

Master Hakuin replied, "When a student engaged in meditation finds that he is exhausted in body and mind because the four constituent elements of his body are in a state of disharmony, he should gird up his spirit and perform the following visualization:

"Imagine that a lump of soft butter, pure in color and fragrance and the size and shape of a duck egg, is suddenly placed on the top of your head. As it begins to slowly melt, it imparts an exquisite sensation, moistening and saturating your head within and without. It continues to ooze down, moistening your shoulders, elbows, and chest; permeating lungs, diaphragm, liver, stomach, and bowels; moving down the spine through the hips, pelvis, and buttocks.

"At that point, all the congestions that have accumulated

within the five organs and six viscera, all the aches and pains in the abdomen and other affected parts, will follow the heart as it sinks downward into the lower body. As it does, you will distinctly hear a sound like that of water trickling from a higher to a lower place. It will move lower down through the lower body, suffusing the legs with beneficial warmth, until it reaches the soles of the feet, where it stops.

"The student should then repeat the contemplation. As his vital energy flows downward, it gradually fills the lower region of the body, suffusing it with penetrating warmth, making him feel as if he were sitting up to his navel in a hot bath filled with a decoction of rare and fragrant medicinal herbs that have been gathered and infused by a skilled physician.

"Inasmuch as all things are created by the mind, when you engage in this contemplation, the nose will actually smell the marvelous scent of pure, soft butter; your body will feel the exquisite sensation of its melting touch. Your body and mind will be in perfect peace and harmony. You will feel better and enjoy greater health than you did as a youth of twenty or thirty. At this time, all the undesirable accumulations in your vital organs and viscera will melt away. Stomach and bowels will function perfectly. Before you know it, your skin will glow with health. If you continue to practice the contemplation with diligence, there is no illness that cannot be cured, no virtue that cannot be acquired, no level of sagehood that cannot be reached, no religious practice that cannot be mastered. Whether such results appear swiftly or slowly depends only upon how scrupulously you apply yourself.

"I was a sickly youth, in much worse shape than you are now. I experienced ten times the suffering you have endured. The doctors finally gave up on me. I explored hundreds of cures on my own, but none of them brought me any relief. I turned to the gods for help. Prayed to the deities of both heaven and earth, begging them for their subtle, imperceptible assistance. I was marvelously blessed. They extended me their support and protection.

I came upon this wonderful method of soft-butter contemplation. My joy knew no bounds. I immediately set about practicing it with total and single-minded determination. Before even a month was out, my troubles had almost totally vanished. Since that time, I've never been the least bit bothered by any complaint, physical or mental.

"I became like an ignoramus, mindless and utterly free of care. I was oblivious to the passage of time. I never knew what day or month it was, even whether it was a leap year or not. I gradually lost interest in the things the world holds dear, soon forgot completely about the hopes and desires and customs of ordinary men and women. In my middle years, I was compelled by circumstance to leave Kyoto and take refuge in the mountains of Wakasa Province. I lived there nearly thirty years, unknown to my fellow men. Looking back on that period of my life, it seems as fleeting and unreal as the dream-life that flashed through Lu-sheng's slumbering brain.<sup>46</sup>

"Now I live here in this solitary spot in the hills of Shirakawa, far from all human habitation. I have a layer or two of clothing to wrap around my withered old carcass. But even in midwinter, on nights when the cold bites through the thin cotton, I don't freeze. Even during the months when there are no mountain fruits or nuts for me to gather, and I have no grain to eat, I don't starve. It is all thanks to this contemplation.

"Young man, you have just learned a secret that you could not use up in a whole lifetime. What more could I teach you?"

#### TAKING LEAVE OF HAKUYŪ

Master Hakuyū sat silently with his eyes closed. I thanked him profusely, my own eyes glistening with tears, and then bade him farewell. The last vestiges of light were lingering in the topmost

branches of the trees as I left the cave and made my way slowly down the mountain. Suddenly, I was stopped in my tracks by the *clap* of wooden clogs striking the stony ground and echoing up from the sides of the valley. Half in wonder, half in disbelief, I peered apprehensively around to see the figure of Master Hakuyū coming toward me in the distance.

When he was near enough to speak, he said, "No one uses these mountain trails. It's easy to lose your way. You might have trouble getting back, so I'll take you partway down." A skinny wooden staff grasped in his hand, high wooden clogs on his feet, he walked on ahead of me, talking and laughing. He moved nimbly and effortlessly over rugged cliffs and steep mountainside, covering the difficult terrain with the ease of someone strolling through a well-kept garden. After a league or so, we came to the mountain stream. He said if I followed it I would have no trouble finding my way back to the village of Shirakawa. With what seemed a look of sadness, he then turned and began to retrace his steps.

Again, I pressed my palms together and bowed my head low in thanks. I stood there motionless, watching as Master Hakuyū made his way up the mountain trail, marveling at the strength and vigor of his step. He moved with such light, unfettered freedom, as if he were one who had transcended this world, had sprouted wings, and was flying up to join the ranks of immortal sages. Gazing at him, my heart was filled with respect, and with a touch of envy as well. I also felt a pang of regret, knowing that never again in this lifetime would I be able to encounter and learn from a man such as this.

#### THE BENEFITS OF INTROSPECTIVE MEDITATION

I went directly back to Shōin-ji. There I devoted myself to Introspective Meditation, practicing it over and over on my own. In

less than three years—without recourse to medicine, acupuncture, or moxicaution—the illnesses that had been plaguing me for years cleared up of themselves. What is more, during the same period I experienced the immense joy of great satori six or seven times, boring through and penetrating to the root of all those hard-to-believe, hard-to-penetrate, hard-to-grasp, and hard-to-enter koans that I had never before been able to get my teeth into at all. I attained countless small satoris as well, which sent me waltzing about waving my hands in the air in mindless dance. I then knew for the first time that Zen master Ta-hui had not been deceiving me when he had written about experiencing eighteen great satoris and countless small ones.

In the past, I used to wear two and even three layers of *tabi*, but the soles of my feet still always felt as though they were soaking in tubs of ice. Now, even in the third month, the coldest time of year, I didn't need even a single pair.<sup>47</sup> I no longer required a brazier to keep myself warm. I am more than eighty years old this year, but even now I never suffer from the slightest indisposition. Surely all of this is due to the lingering benefits I enjoy from having practiced the wonderful secret technique of Intropective Meditation.

## EPILOGUE

Ever thinking about it now, the tears trickle down my leathery old cheeks—I just can't help it.<sup>48</sup> Four or five years ago, I had a dream. Master Hakyū had come all the way from the hills of Shirakawa to visit me here at Shoin-ji. We spent a whole night laughing and talking together. I felt so happy that the following morning I told the monks living at the temple all about it. They bowed and pressed their palms together in attitudes of worship. "Good! Good!" they said. "Maybe it will come to pass. Perhaps

the dream will become reality. If Master Hakyū did come here, it would be a great honor for the temple.

"You turned eighty this year, master, but your mind and body are both still strong and vigorous. You teach us and extend your help to other students far and wide. Isn't it all thanks to Master Hakyū? Let one or two of us go to Kyoto and invite him to visit Shoin-ji. He could live here at the temple. We could provide for his needs through our begging."

A feeling of elation passed through the brotherhood. Plans began to be laid. Then a monk stepped forward. "Hold on," he said, laughing. "You're making the mistake of marking the side of a moving boat to show where the sword fell in. I'm sorry to have to be the one to tell you this, but Master Hakyū, the person you are talking about, is no longer alive. He died this past summer."

The monks clapped their hands in astonishment.

"You shouldn't repeat idle rumors like that!" I said, admonishing the monk. "Hakyū is no ordinary man. He is one of the immortal sages who just happens to walk the earth. How could such a man die?"

"Unfortunately, that was his undoing. It is because he trod the earth that he met his death. Last summer, it seems he was walking in the mountains and came to the edge of a deep ravine. It was more than a hundred yards to the other side. He tried to leap across, but he didn't make it. He fell to the rocks below. His death was lamented by villagers far and near."

The monk, his story completed, stood there with a forlorn look on his face. I found my own eyes shedding copious tears.

Don't be saying old Hakuin, half dead and gasping out his final breaths, has recklessly scribbled out a long tissue of groundless nonsense hoping to hoodwink superior students. What I've put down here is not intended for those who possess spiritual powers of the first order—the kind of superior seeker who is

awakened at a single blow from his master's mallet. But if dull, plodding oafs like me—the kind of people who will suffer from illness as I did—get a look at this book, read and contemplate its meaning, they should surely be able to obtain a little help from it. In fact, after giving the matter more consideration, I think perhaps the benefit will not necessarily be small. In any event, the main thing—what we must all cherish and revere—is the secret method of Introspective Meditation.

In the spring of the seventh year of the Hōreki era [1757], I composed a work in Japanese that I called *Idle Talk on a Night Boat*. In it, I set forth the essential principles of the meditation. Ever since then, people of all kinds—monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen—have told me how, when the odds were stacked ten to one against them, they were saved from the misery of grave and incurable illnesses owing to the wonderful benefits of Introspective Meditation. They have come to me here at Shōin-ji in nuns I cannot even count to thank me in person.

Two or three years ago, a young man—he must have been about twenty-two or twenty-three—showed up at the temple asking to see me. When I stepped out to greet him, I was taken aback by the great bundle of presents—including several gold coins—he had brought for me. He bowed his head to the ground. “I am so-and-so from Matsuzaka in Ise Province,” he said. “About six years ago, I came down with a serious ailment, which I found impossible to cure. I tried all the secret remedies I knew, but none of them had any effect whatever. All the physicians I consulted wrote me off as a hopeless case. It seemed then that there was nothing left for me to do except await the end. A wonderful thing then happened. I chanced to read *Idle Talk on a Night Boat*. As best I could with my meager abilities, I began to practice the secret technique of Introspective Meditation on my own. What a blessing it was! Little by little, my energy began to return. Today I am restored to perfect health. I can’t tell you how happy

and thankful I felt. I was dancing on air! Since it had all come about because I happened upon *Idle Talk on a Night Boat*, there was nowhere I could go—no physician or healer to whom I could express my gratitude. Fortunately, however, as I was mulling what I should do, I heard a vague rumor that you, Master Hakuin, were the author of *Idle Talk on a Night Boat*. Immediately, I wanted to see your revered countenance so I could express my profound gratitude to you in person. On the pretext of transacting some business in Edo, I traveled all the way from Ise Province to see you. This is the happiest moment of my entire life. Nothing could exceed it.”

As I listened to him relate the details of his story, can you imagine the happiness this old monk also felt?

I’m only afraid that other people, when they read this work, will clap their hands and break into great peals of laughter. Why is that?

*A horse calmly chewing its fodder*

*Disturbs a man at his midday nap.<sup>49</sup>*

Written on the Buddha’s birthday, the third year of Meiwa [1766]