

## **Koan Commentaries**

When Master Kyozan Ejaku was master of Tohei Temple, Master Isan Reiyu sent him a letter along with a mirror.

The package arrived at the temple and Master Kyozan took it with him to the Lecture Hall, held up the mirror and said to his assembly: *Students, Master Isan sent this mirror and it has arrived here. Now I would like you to discuss this for a while. Is this mirror Isan's or is it Tohei's? If you say this mirror is now Tohei's, I will say it is a present from Isan. If you say it was sent from Isan, I will say it is now in the Master of Tohei's hand. If you can show me the truth I will keep the mirror, if you cannot show me anything I will smash the mirror at once.*

He repeated this three times. None of the assembly could answer so the Master smashed the mirror into pieces.

**Commentary by Nishijima** When Master Kyozan Ejaku received a letter and mirror from Master Isan he used it to test his disciples on the difference between a subjective viewpoint and an objective viewpoint. He asked his disciples whether the mirror belonged to Isan or Tohei.

If we think about the situation objectively the mirror is now Tohei's, but if we think of it abstractly the mirror was a present from Master Isan. Master Kyozan asked his disciples to show him what the real situation was, but no one could reply, so in the end he smashed the

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mirror.

Reality is neither objective nor subjective. Smashing the mirror, even though a somewhat melodramatic action, was Master Kyozan's real act in the present moment.

**Commentary by John Fraser** This story is about wholeness and differentiation, personal and universal; both, together. Not part one and part other but both, together.

In Kokyo, Dogen collects a number of koan stories where a mirror is used as a metaphor for dependent origination. Each of us "is" dependent origination [the mirror] and at the same time we occupy our own dharma position.[the person]. So, when Kyozan holds the mirror, Kyozan doesn't disappear, yet the mirror is the same mirror as was held by Isan.

Kyozan smashing the mirror is illusory. The mirror can't be destroyed. When smashed into a million billion pieces, each piece is the mirror, and at the same time a particular dharma position.