

The Case (adapted):

Master Tozan was asked by a monk, "When we are going along a narrow path, how should we proceed?"

Tozan said, "Poisonous snakes are found even on a broad path, and I advise you not to attack one directly"

The Monk said, "If I do, what will happen?"

Tozan said, "Just at that moment, there will be no room for you to escape"

The Monk said, "Would you tell me about 'just at this moment'?"

Tozan said, "All things are lost"

The Monk said, "Where have they gone?"

Tozan said, "Because of the grasses, we cannot find them"

The Monk said, "Master, if you go to the river bank you can get there at once"

Tozan rubbed his hands and said "The air now is poisonous"

Commentary:

Nagarjuna said that we should approach Emptiness as we would approach a poisonous snake. We cannot avoid it.

But if we attack it, we remain in duality. Likewise if we ignore it. We should pay careful attention to Tozan's "you".

Tozan was one of the founders of our Soto tradition, our narrow path. Unlike other traditions, we don't engage with Emptiness "directly". We don't use koans. We don't intellectually engage with

Shinji Shobogenzo, Book 3, Case 4

Written by News Administrator

Monday, 16 October 2017 16:53 - Last Updated Monday, 16 October 2017 17:00

it. We just sit. But isn't that engaging directly? Because no "you" remains?

The Chinese Masters were keen that we didn't misconstrue Emptiness as nothingness, or vacuity. Neither that we reified it. So they reconfigured Emptiness as Suchness, Is-Ness. The world is empty of our concepts and names, so what we choose to demarcate as distinct things 'disappear' and are lost. "Grasses" or "Myriad Grasses" is a way of talking about all beings, all things. In Suchness, we cannot find one thing as it is part of everything, which is whole.

The Monk finally alludes to the last part of the Heart Sutra - the Sutra on Emptiness - but for Tozan, this is exactly the sort of intellectual engagement he has disparaged, and so he dismisses the Monk.