January 2019 (revised March 2023)

Koans, part 1, selections mostly from The Gateless Gate by Mumon (1183-1260) comments by student t

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'A koan is a story, dialogue, question or statement which is used in Zen practice to provoke the 'great doubt' and test a student's progress in Zen practice' (Wikipedia <koan>). Types in bold italics are direct quotes.

1. What is the sound of one hand clapping? (original version: You know the sound of two hands clapping; tell me, what is the sound of one hand? Hakuin Ekaku 1686-1769)
   a. The sound of one hand clapping is the sound of imagination.
   b. Short answer: The sound of one hand clapping is the sound of the earth. Learn to listen to the sound of the earth
   c. Long answer: Humans hear sound in the range of 20 to 20,000 hertz. Sound frequencies less than 20 hertz is called infrasound; sound frequencies greater than 20,000 hertz is called ultrasound. Infrasounds are generated by earthquakes, volcanoes, tidal waves, wind, lightning, alligators, elephants, giraffes, pigeons, rhinoceros, tigers and whales. Ultrasounds are generated by mice, cats, dogs, coyotes, frogs, crickets, bats, moths, dolphins and whales. Clapping with one hand by waving it back and forth 1 cycle per second generates infrasound at 1 hertz which is within the infrasound of the earth. Humans are just one species on this planet with a narrow hearing range. Learn to hear the sounds of the earth and become a member of the planetary community.

2. Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water; after enlightenment, chop wood, carry water
   a. Enlightenment is an inward spiritual journey unrelated to external appearances. An enlightened person chopping wood and carrying water looks the same as an unenlightened person chopping wood and carrying water.
   b. Dynamic activity driven by a higher purpose: before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water; after enlightenment engineer wood and water into a beaver dam. Water slowly leaks out the bottom of the dam during dry season and refills during wet season. This extends the availability of surface water; provide habitats for aquatic plants and animals, which provide food for more diverse predators to live. Work with other co-creators on earth to provide new avenues for multiple species to participate in evolution of consciousness. Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water after enlightenment reformulated wood and water, and expand opportunities for plants and animals in the ecosystem. Act with an understanding of evolution on earth. Wisdom without action is futile; action without wisdom is dangerous.

3. If you can do nothing what can you do?
   a. Nothing = no thing; a state prior to the manifestation of things; a state without judgment, discrimination or separation; unity, to be at one with all things; to be in spirit.
   b. Do nothing, be at one with all things in spirit: meditate.
   c. 'Things' = physical things; or 'things' = physical and nonphysical, stuff in the chemical region, ether, desire and concrete thought; whereas the spiritual realm for humans is the region of abstract thought, imagination and will.
The following koans are selected from a collection of 48 cases: The Gateless Gate, by Mumon (1183-1260), translated by Eiichi Shimomisse, 1998; with occasional reference to other translations. Most of Mumon’s comments are omitted here; see original text for his comments and the complete set of koans.

**Case 1: Joshu’s dog.**

* A monk asked Joshu, "Has the dog the Buddha nature?"
* Joshu replied, "Mu"

a. Mu (Japanese), Wu (Mandarin): none, no, nobody, not, without, nothing, no thing, empty, not in manifestation, a state without judgment, discrimination or separation; unity, to be at one with all things; to be in spirit. Mu, an ambiguous reply: does ‘mu’ refer to the question, to the person asking the question, Buddha nature, dog’s Buddha nature, or duality of have or not have.

b. Mu = no, wrong direction, questions about a dog’s Buddha nature will not lead to your own spiritual awakening. Your spiritual development is your concern; the dog’s spiritual nature is the dog’s concern.

c. Mu = no, the question leads nowhere. Such questions seeks information, data, knowledge, facts = nouns. Spiritual development is attained by work, serve, help, love, sing, walk, create, imagine, meditate = verb.

d. Mu = no thing = not in the realm of manifestation; Buddha nature is in the spiritual realm, not in the realm of manifestation.

e. Mu = no, avoid dead end questions about duality: have or not have. If Joshu answered the ‘yes or no’ question then Joshu would have participated in duality dialog, and promote the monk’s pursuit of more duality questions.

i. Dualities are opposing noun-noun or opposing verb-verb relationships that can be argued forever, for and against. Noun-noun dualities are yes-no; this-that; right-wrong; good-evil; black-white; motion-stillness; karma-no karma; spirit-matter; and cause-effect. Verb-verb dualities are have-not have; know-not know; understand-not understand; come-go; give-take; begin-end; rise-fall; and cause-effect. Transcend duality through nonduality by being at one with all things, without judgment, discrimination, separation of things into this and that.

ii. Verb-noun relationships are not part of duality. For example, ‘Paul owns the farm but migrant workers farm the land using old farm equipment’: farm (noun) is not the antithesis of farm (verb) or farm (adjective). In ‘the rebel without a cause rebels against his father’, rebel (noun) is not the antithesis of rebel (verb). There are 800+ words that can be use as verb and noun; such words are not antithesis or duality to itself; verbs are not antithesis to nouns. To transcend duality, find appropriate activity with purpose, verb-noun relationships.

iii. Transcend duality through verb-noun relationships, activity with purpose: awaken-consciousness, seek-path; walk-path; serve-humanity; evolve-purpose; and find-salvation. Note: there are 2 different spiritual paths that utilize verb-noun relationships: the Zen path of nonduality and the path of evolution with purpose. Nonduality is being at one with all things, in the present moment, now, today, without separation of time into past, present, and future, without linking to manifestation. Whereas, spiritual development through manifestation, evolution with purpose and karma separates time into past, present and future with the goal of making gradual improvements over time, and enlightenment is attained at some future time; this path is linked to manifestation.
Case 2: Hyakujo’s fox

Whenever Hyakujo delivered a Zen lecture, an old man was always there with the monks listening to it; and when they left the Hall, so did he. One day, however, he remained behind, and Hyakujo asked, "Who are you?"

The old man replied, "Yes, I am not a human being, but in the far distant past, when the Kashapa Buddha (the Sixth Buddha of the Seven Ancient Buddhas) preached in this world, I was the head monk in this mountain area. On one occasion a monk asked me whether an enlightened man could fall again under the law of karma (cause and effect), and I answered that he could not. Thus I became a fox for 500 rebirths and am still a fox. I beg you to release me from this condition through your Zen words."

Then he asked Hyakujo, "Is an enlightened man subject to the law of karma?" Hyakujo answered, "No one is free from the law of Karma."

At the words of Hyakujo the old man was enlightened, and said with a bow, "I am now released from rebirth as a fox and my body will be found on the other side of the mountain. May I request that you bury me as a dead monk?"

The next day Hyakujo had the Karmadana, or deacon, beat the clapper and he informed the monks that after the midday meal there would be a funeral service for a dead monk. "No one was sick or died," wondered the monks. "What does our Roshi mean?" After they had eaten, Hyakujo led them to the foot of a rock on the furthest side of the mountain, and with his staff poked the dead body of a fox and had it ritually cremated.

In the evening Hyakujo gave a talk to the monks and told them this story of the law of Karma. Upon hearing the story, Obaku asked Hyakujo, "You said that because a long time ago an old Zen master gave a wrong answer he became a fox for 500 rebirths. But suppose every time he answered he had not made a mistake, what would have happened then?" Hyakujo replied, "Just come here to me, and I will tell you the answer!

Obaku then went up to Hyakujo--and slapped the teacher's face. Hyakujo, clapping his hands and laughing, exclaimed, "I thought the Persian had a red beard, but here is another one with a red beard!"

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a. The question *subject to* or *free from the laws of karma* resides in duality in the realm of manifestation. Focusing exclusively on manifestation leads death of spirit. Focusing exclusively on spirit leads to death in manifestation. Duality is avoided by non-duality. Sidestep duality; be in the world but not of the world; accept all things as they are without judgment or qualification; be at one with all things; avoid fault-finding or seeking to oppose, be in the moment, now, is.

b. Another Way to avoid duality is to discover purpose in verb-noun relationships instead of opposition in noun-to-noun or opposition in verb-to-verb dualities. Verb-noun relationships are not part of duality (see Case 1 comments).

c. The enlightened man is not subject to karma in the spiritual realm. However, the enlightened man is subject to karma in the realm of manifestation. Manifestation demands the existence of time; past, present and future; debts, obligations and destiny; whereas in the spiritual realm, there is only 'now'. Which *karma* was the monk referring to, karma of spirit or karma of manifestation; or did the monk failed to distinguish the two, hence trapped in endlessness until Hyakujo freed him.

d. Time in the spiritual realm is 'now', there is no karma. Time in the realm of manifestation is past, present and future, governed by karma. The two time frames, karma and no karma, can not be mix, otherwise you get inconsistent arguments such as 'Lucifer's complaint': 'if there is no time then there is no karma. If there is no karma,
then allow me the pleasure of committing crimes for which I have already been punished. You, god, punished me first, now let me commit the crimes that you and your cohorts have already punished me'. If there is no time, then any criminal could make the same argument as Lucifer: there is no karma, I did not do anything wrong, society punished me first, now let me commit the crimes that I have already been convicted and punished by society. However, if there is no time then there is no 'you punish me first' followed by 'now allow me to do' subsequent to the punishment. The sleight of hand arguments asserts both 'there is no time' and 'there is time; no time for karma yet there is time for subsequent crimes.

e. **No one is free from the law of Karma** in the realm of manifestation. Even a master must eat and acknowledge the difference between hunger before eating and hunger after eating; the moment in time before eating is a different moment than after eating; if you are in-the-moment, now, at-one-with-all-things, are you hungry? Other questions used to challenge students 'understanding of duality between spirit and manifestation: are you thirsty, where did you come from, what did you do, and are there space, time, location, motion and things? Zen response to duality is nonduality; avoid duality through being at one with all things, be in the moment, now. Duality can also be resolved through verb-noun relationships, evolution with purpose, make gradual improvements over time and attain enlightenment at some future time.

**Case 3: Gutei’s finger**

Gutei raised his finger whenever he was asked a question about Zen. A boy attendant began to imitate him in this way. When a visitor asked the boy what his master had preached about, the boy raised his finger.

Gutei heard about the boy’s mischief, seized him and cut off his finger with a knife. As the boy screamed and ran out of the room, Gutei called to him. When the boy turned his head to Gutei, Gutei raised up his own finger. In that instant the boy was enlightened.

When Gutei was about to die, he said to the assembled monks, "I received this one-finger Zen from Tenryu. I used it all my life and yet could not exhaust it" and then he passed away.

a. **'Whenever he was asked a question about Zen'**: questions, answers, information, knowledge, data, instruction, opinion, news, gospel, scripture, sutras, teachings, and facts = nouns

b. **'Raised his finger'** = stay focused on your one most important objective; do not stray into idle talks and questions. Raise, focus, concentrate, meditate, live, work = verbs. The spiritual path is activity with objective, a verb-noun relationship.

c. **I received this one-finger Zen from Tenryu. I used it all my life and yet could not exhaust it**: I have not exhausted the need to stay focus. Enlightenment depends on staying focus, not on having finger tip.

**Case 5: Kyogen’s man hanging in the tree**

Kyogen said, "It (Zen) is like a man (monk) hanging by his teeth in a tree over a precipice. His hands grasp no branch, his feet rest on no limb, and under the tree another man asks him, 'Why did Bodhidharma come to China from the West (India)?' If
the man in the tree does not answer, he misses the question, and if he answers, he falls and loses his life. Now what shall he do?"

a. **If he answers, he falls and loses his life**: If the hanging man opens his mouth to speak, he falls. He can act with gestures instead of using words. Talk, talk, and more talk will not get you far on the path. *The Path is fundamentally without words*, The Blue Cliff Record, case 25, commentary.

b. Poetry is not river. You can describe a river with eloquent poetry, but a river supports aquatic life, delivers drinking water to cites, provide irrigation water for vegetations, generate hydroelectricity, transport nutrients, sediments and cargo, and provide space for aquatic recreation. Descriptions of river and descriptions of path are information = noun. Act, motion, gesture, support, deliver, provide, generate and transport = verb.

c. The question *Why did the Bodhidharma come to China from the West?* seeks facts, information, data, and knowledge = noun; the question does not need to be answered with words. What shall the monk do? Not answer the question with words, respond with silence, motion, gesture, teach by action, walk the path = verb-noun relationship.

**Case 7: Joshu's washing the bowl**

A monk told Joshu, "I have just entered this monastery. I beg you to teach me." Joshu asked, "Have you eaten your rice porridge?" The monk replied, "I have." "Then," said Joshu, "Go and wash your bowl." At that moment the monk was enlightened.

Mumon's verse:

*He made it so simple and clear,*
*It might take a long time to catch the point,*
*If one realizes that it's stupid to search for fire with a lantern light,*
*The rice would not take so long to be done.*

RH Blyth translation of Mumon's last 2 lines:

*If you realize that it's foolish to look for fire with fire,*
*the meal won't take long to cook.*

Y Koun translation:

*If you quickly acknowledge that the candlelight is fire,*
*you will find that the rice has long been cooked.*

P Lynch translation:

*Don't you know that flame is fire?*
*your breakfast has long been cooked.*

Stargate translation (TV science fiction series, 1997-2007: season 3.20 Maternal Instinct; season 5.21 Meridian; and season 8.16 Reckoning, Part 1):

*If you immediately know the candlelight is fire,*
*then the meal was cooked a long time ago.*
a. 'Have you eaten?' = is there time? In the spiritual realm, there is no time; whereas time exists in the realm of manifestation. How do you reconcile awareness of time in spirit and awareness of time in manifestation? If there is no time in the spiritual realm what is hunger of spirit? Nonduality sidesteps duality by being at one with all things, be in the moment, is, now, hunger and sate are both part of life. A different way to resolve the duality of hunger and sate is through work, activity, passage of time, evolution with purpose, manifestation, karma and gradual improvement of the spirit. The passage of time has past, present and future; hunger and sate occurs at 2 different time. Whereas now, today, being in the moment has no time differentiation.

b. 'I have (eaten)' = acknowledgement of time, hunger prior to eating and sate after eating, and manifestation of things.

c. 'Go and wash your bowl': go, wash, and work = verbs. When living in the realm of manifestation, you must work. There is evolution and purpose in the realm of manifestation, go find your purpose in evolution; activity with objective = verb-noun relationship.

d. 'At that moment the monk was enlightened' = reconciliation between spirit and manifestation; discover nonduality or discover spiritual purpose in evolution.

e. Literal translation of last 2 lines of Mumon's verse: early/already know flame is fire, food has long been cooked: 'If flame realizes it is fire, the meal is already cook’… cows would spontaneously milk themselves, the milk would spontaneously churn itself into butter, the butter would spontaneously spread itself on your toast, ready for you to eat; and meditation would allow spiritual wisdom to spontaneously pour itself into your mind, ready for you to grasp without effort, leading to spontaneous enlightenment. Not so, flame does not spontaneously realize it is fire; rice does not spontaneously cook itself. If you seek enlightenment, you must work.

f. If you already know flame is fire, food has long been cooked. But many do not spontaneously realize that flame is fire, they learn the hard way by getting their hands burned. A child with burnt fingers did not spontaneously realize flame is fire at birth or prior to being burn by flame, people do not spontaneously become a Mozart, students do not spontaneously become enlighten. Such occurrence arises from accumulated efforts through past lives culminating in the present enlightenment. If you seek enlightenment, you must work with purpose; or seek the path of nonduality and sidestep know and not know; cook and not cook.

**Case 8: Keichu's wheel**

Gettan asked a monk, "If Keichu (the ancient mythological wheel maker) made one hundred carts, and if we took off the wheels and removed the hub uniting the spokes, what would then become apparent?

Mumon's verse:

*When the hubless wheel turns,*  
*Even the master would be at a loss what to do,*  
*It turns above heaven and beneath earth,*  
*South, north, east, and west.*
Koans, part 1, selections from The Gateless Gate

RH Blythe translation of first 2 lines

*Where the wheel of the mind-activity turns
Even a master doesn’t know what to do about it.*

Y Kuon translation

*Where the active wheel revolves,
Even a master fails.*

P Lynch translation

*where the wheel of mind activity turns
even the master falls into ignorance*

K Sekida translation

*When the spiritual wheels turn,
Even a master fails to follow them*

a. In the world of thought, wheel has hub and spokes; a hubless wheel is not a wheel. If the imaginary hubless wheel does turn, *even the master would be at a loss.* Similarly, ‘which came first, the chicken or the egg?’ In the world of thought, the chicken and egg are the same; they both came at the same time. A chicken without digestive and reproductive system is not a chicken.

b. *What would then become apparent?* = discern the difference between real, theoretical, imaginary and meaningless. Manifestation tests discernment.

c. *South, north, east and west* are compass directions listed in oppositions. Modern Chinese recital of compass direction is ‘east, south, west, north’ listing in circular order (uncertain of the order of listing in Mumon’s time, 1183-1260). *’When the hubless wheel turns… south, north, east, and west’* it turns in opposition, in the realm of duality.

**Case 10: Sozan and poor Seizai**

A monk named Seizai said to Sozan, “I am alone and poor. I beg my teacher to bestow upon me the alms of salvation.” Sozan said, “Acarya Seizai!” “Yes, Sir?” replied Seizai. Sozan said, “Someone has drunk three bowls of the wine of Haku of Seigen, but says that he has not yet even moistened his lips.”

a. Seizai had already received 3 bowls of spiritual teachings (wine) but the wine did not sink in, was not digested, *has not yet even moistened his lips.*

b. Enlightenment that Seizai seek is to discover purpose within manifestation and passage through time: activity with objective (verb-noun relationships).

c. If Seizai received the alms of salvation without labor, he would forego the development of his character that accrues through labor. Labor is a purifier of the mind.

**Case 12: Zuigan calls himself ‘master’**

Every day Zuigan used to call out to himself, “Master!” and then he answered himself, ”Yes, Sir!” And he added, ”Awake, Awake!” and then answered, ”Yes, Sir! Yes, Sir!” ”From now onwards, do not be deceived by others!” ”No, Sir! I will not, Sir!”
a. Words, proclamations, exhortations, shouts of ‘master, awake’, ‘yes’ and ‘no’, are all words. Poetry is not river. You can describe a river with eloquent poetry; you can describe the Way with eloquent words but description, information, data, knowledge, scripture, proclamations, exhortation = noun. Whereas walk, search, live, meditate and serve = verbs. ‘The Path is fundamentally without words’, The Blue Cliff Record, case 25, commentary.

b. Zuigan deceived himself and others with grand display of words = nouns. The Way is nonduality, acceptance of all things as they are without qualification, judgment, proclamation, exhortation or shouts. An alternate to nonduality is activity with objective; build individual’s character through quality of work and quality of things; find your purpose in evolution and make gradual improvements over time (verb-noun relationships).

Case 14: Nansen cuts the cat in two

Nansen saw the monks of the eastern and western halls fighting over a baby cat. He seized the cat and said, “If (any of) you can say (a word of Zen), you can spare the cat. Otherwise I will kill it.” No one could answer. So Nansen cut the cat in two.

That evening Joshu returned and Nansen told him what had happened. Joshu thereupon took off his sandals and, placing them on his head, walked away. Nansen said, “If only you had been there, you could have saved the cat.”

a. Eastern and western halls = opposition; duality fighting over a cat.

b. Say (a word of Zen): to be, act, now, instead of using words to convey information, fact, data, and knowledge. No one could answer: no Zen

c. Sandals = that which we stand on, individual’s identity, self respect and our standing in society. Sandals on head = conventional wisdom. Remove your sandals before entering the room = remove that which you stand on, your self identity before entering the room. Remove your sandals and stand barefooted on the earth = remove your self identity and see the world from the perspective of the earth; be a member of the planetary community; expand your perception of the world beyond human social understandings, identity, and self respect.

Case 15: Tozan’s sixty blows

Tozan went to Ummon and Ummon asked him where he had come from. Tozan answered, “From Sato!” Then Ummon asked, “Where were you then during the Summer?” Tozan answered, “At Hoji Temple in Konan Province.” Ummon further asked Tozan, “When did you leave there?” Tozan replied, “I left on August 25.” Ummon told Tozan, “You deserve 60 blows, but I will forgive you today!”

The next day Tozan knelt and deeply bowed to Ummon and said, “Yesterday you forgave me the 60 blows, but I still do not understand in what respect I was wrong.” Then Ummon told Tozan, “You are really a good-for-nothing rice eater! No wonder you wandered around Konan and Kosei for nothing!” At this very moment, Tozan was awakened.

a. Tozan viewed the world through ordinary understanding of nouns as person, place, things and ideas: Sato, Konan Province, Hoji temple, August 25, and rice. ‘Nothing’ = no things, not in manifestation, that which is prior to the manifestation of things, a state without judgment, discrimination or separation; unity, at one with all
things; to be in spirit. 'Nothing' or 'no thing' redirected Tozan's perception toward the spiritual realm: he came from spirit into form; in summer he attempt to reform his understanding; afterwards he left on an inward retreat to meditate on the words 'good-for-nothing' and 'wandering around Konan and Kosei for nothing'.
b. 'Where did he come from...Sato = physical location; Tozan could have said 'I came from spirit into form'. Where were you...Hoji Temple = the name of a physical location; or Tozan could have said 'in state of doubt'. When did you leave...August 25 = there is time, manifestation of things and motion in things; or Tozan could have said 'barren, empty'. You deserve 60 blows' to awaken spirit to depart from the realm of manifestation of things, places and time, Konan Province, Hoji temple, August 25 and rice.

Case 19: Nansen's ordinary mind
Joshu asked Nansen, "What is the Way?" Nansen answered, "Your ordinary mind—that is the Way." Joshu said, "Can it be grasped (for study)?" Nansen replied, "The more you pursue, the more does it slip away." Joshu asked once more, "How can you know it is the Way?" Nansen responded, "The Way does not belong to knowledge, nor does it belong to non knowledge. Knowledge is illusion. Non knowledge is beyond discrimination. When you get to this Way without doubt, you are free like the vastness of space, an unfathomable void, so how can you explain it by yes or no?" Upon hearing this, Joshu was awakened.

RH Blyth translation:
The Way does not belong to knowing or not knowing. Knowing is illusion. Not knowing is lack of discrimination

Y Koun translation:
The Way does not belong to knowing or not knowing. Knowing is delusion; not knowing is a blank consciousness.

P Lynch translation:
The true Way is not dependant on understand or not understanding. Understanding is illusion; not understanding is blankness.

K Sekida translation:
The Way is not a matter of knowing or not knowing. Knowing is delusion; not knowing is confusion.

N Senzaki translation
The path does not belong to the perception world, neither does it belong to the nonperception world. Cognition is a delusion and noncognition is senseless.

a. Knowing and not knowing: understanding and not understanding = verb-verb dualities in the realm of manifestation. The Way of nonduality leads to the spiritual realm, whereas acquiring more knowledge, information, fact, data, rules, commandments, and opinions will not lead to the spirit. An alternate Way is to labor in the world of manifestation and develop individual character through quality in labor
and quality in things. This will develop the necessary skills to be better stewards of the earth, assistants to lesser-gods-in-the-making, and companions of eternity.

b. ‘Can it be grasped’, ‘pursue’, ‘belong to knowledge’ and qualifying as ‘yes’ or ‘no’ = knowledge, data, information, facts, things = nouns. The Way is using your ordinary mind in ordinary things of the world, guided by spiritual purpose. In the ordinary world, before enlightenment, chop wood carry water; after enlightenment chop wood, carry water. Find spiritual purpose in the ordinary: work, meditate, practice, imagine, develop, build, walk, love, sing, and understand with purpose (verb-noun relationships). The ordinary is not distinguished, separated, isolated, selected, outstanding, or chosen.

Case 25: Kyozan’s sermon from the third seat.

In a dream Kyozan went to Maitreya’s Pure Land and sat in the third seat. A monk there beat the gavel and said, ”Today the one in the third seat will give a sermon.” Kyozan arose, hit the gavel and said,”The truth of Mahayana is beyond any verbal expression! Listen, listen!”

a. Words, scripture, sermons, information, data and knowledge = nouns.

b. The real sermon is verb-noun relationships: teach by example, not words. *The Path is fundamentally without words*, The Blue Cliff Record, case 25, commentary.

Case 27: Nansen’s no mind, no Buddha

A monk asked Nansen, ”Is there any teaching no master has ever preached before?” Nansen replied, ”Yes, there is.” ”What is it?” asked the monk. Nansen answered, ”It is not mind, it is not Buddha, it is not things.”

a. The teaching that has not been preached is life, teach by example without words.

b. The teaching, scripture, information, data, knowledge, description and facts = noun. Poetry is not river, you can describe a river with eloquent poetry; but a river supports life, provide water, transport nutrients, generate electricity, and provide spaces = verb-noun relationships. Describing the path is not walking the path; *The Path is fundamentally without words*.

Case 28: Ryutan’s candle

One night Tokusan went to Ryutan to ask for his teaching. After Tokusan’s many questions, Ryutan said to Tokusan at last, ”It is late. Why don’t you retire?” So Tokusan bowed, lifted the screen and was ready to go out, observing, ”It is very dark outside.” Ryutan lit a candle and offered it to Tokusan. Just as Tokusan received it, Ryutan blew it out. At that moment the mind of Tokusan was opened. ”What have you realized?” asked Ryutan to Tokusan, who replied, ”From now on I will not doubt what you have said.”

The next day Ryutan ascended the rostrum and declared to the monks, ”Among you there is one monk whose teeth are like the sword tree, his mouth is like the blood bowl. Strike him with a stick, he won’t turn his head to look at you. Some day he will climb the highest peaks and carry out my teaching there.”
On that day, in front of the lecture hall, Tokusan burned to ashes his commentaries on the sutras and declared, "In comparison to this awareness, all the most profound teachings are like a single hair in vast space. However deep the complicated knowledge of the world, compared to this enlightenment it is like one drop of water in the ocean." Then he left the monastery.

a. Short answer: Be your own light.
b. Long answer: Learn to see the natural world as the earth sees. Human eyes see a very narrow slice of the electromagnetic spectrum, visible light. If we see the infrared spectrum, we will see as nocturnal animals see. The earth’s heat flux would be seen rising from the surface toward space and reflect downward by clouds. If we see in the microwave spectrum, we would see the simmering cosmic background microwave originating from the birth of this universe. If we see ultraviolet we would see as cat, dog, fish, hedgehog, spider, bee, rat, bird, and moths see. If we see gamma rays, there will never be darkness, for the earth is constantly bathed by rays from distant stars. Learn to see infrared and ultraviolet light; learn to see the natural world as seen by the earth, and there will never be darkness. See the world beyond humanism; realize that we are light, let it shine.

Case 29: Eno’s flag
The wind was flapping a temple flag, and two monks were arguing about the flag. One said, "The flag is moving." The other said, "the wind is moving." They could not agree, no matter how hard they debated. The sixth patriarch, Eno, happened to come by and said, "Not the wind, not the flag. It is the mind that is moving!" The two monks were struck with awe.

a. Spirit precedes manifestation; manifestation precedes perception; perception precedes analysis of perception by the individual’s mind. The individual mind can observe but the observer is not the giver of purpose. The mind can observe and create eloquent poetry about a river but poetry is not river; poetry gave purpose to the mind but the individual mind did not give purpose to river.
b. Mind, flag, and wind are part of manifestation, their predecessor is spirit.

Case 37: JOSHU’S OAK TREE IN THE GARDEN
A monk asked Joshu, "With what intention did Bodhidharma come to China?" Joshu answered, "The oak tree in the front garden."

The oak tree grows, in doing so, acquires experience, and participates in evolution of consciousness. Bodhidharma coming to China is part of the evolution of human consciousness.

Case 43: Shuzan’s bamboo spatula
Master Shuzan held out his bamboo spatula and asked, "If you call this a bamboo spatula, you give umbrage (to the principle of Zen). If you call this no bamboo spatula, you violate the law (of common-sense). What will all of you call this?"
a. **Bamboo spatula** = 'staff of office' in Sekida translation; 'ch'an stick' in Lynch translation; 'short staff' in Senzaki translation. **Bamboo spatula** or not bamboo spatula: yes or no, this or that, duality.

b. 'What will you call this?' Call it 'bamboo spatula' and give a demonstration of how it is used. Name of something = noun; demonstrate how it is used = verb; combine the two = verb-noun relationship.

c. Everything in the physical world is a manifestation of spirit. Language compartmentalizes 'spirit' and 'manifestation' into different words: spirit without manifestation (avoid attachment to things) and manifestation without spirit (reject spirituality, evolution without purpose). Shuzan challenged the monks to transcend the duality of spirit and physical manifestation: the physical form has spiritual aspect; and the spirit pass through physical manifestation. Implied is for the student to transcend duality through nonduality (now); or transcend duality through evolution with purpose (time with past, present and future).

References:

   a. RH Blyth translation with drawing by MT Morse. The Gateless Gate
   b. Y Koun translation, 2014. Mumonkan (Gateless Gate)
   c. P Lynch compiled and edited, 2010. Wu Men Guan, The Barrier that has no Gate
   e. K Sekida translation, 2005. The Gateless Gate
   f. N Senzaki and P Reps, translation 1934. The Gateless Gate


Some of the koans in The Gateless Gate collection also appeared in The Blue Cliff Record (BCR),
   Case 3 = BCR case 19: Chu Ti's One-Finger Ch'an.
   Case 14 = BCR case 63 Nan Ch'uan Kills a Cat; and BCR case 64 Nan Ch'uan questions Chao Chou. See also references to Bodhidharma carrying one shoe in BCR cases 1, 47, and 55.
   Case 15 = BCR case 12 Tung Shan's Three Pound of Hemp, commentary notes
   Case 19 = BCR biography of Tsung Shen (Tsung Shen, Chao Chou and Joshu are the same person)
   Case 27 = BCR case 28 Nan Ch'uan's Truth That's Never Been Spoken
   Case 28 = BCR case 4 Te Shan Carrying His Bundle, commentary