

A Dispute in Sign Language



A Zen master and his one-eyed student lived together in a monastery. One day a wandering monk came to the Zen master and said, "If you will accept me, I wish to study with you."

The old monk replied, "Decide first if you belong here. Go into the garden and speak to my student. Converse with him in any way you wish. After that, come and tell me your decision."

The visiting monk nervously went out into the garden and saw the one-eyed monk meditating. "I will show him how profound I can be," thought the visitor. "I will converse with him in sign language."

Approaching quietly, the visiting monk tapped the one-eyed monk on the shoulder and held up one finger. The one-eyed monk held up two fingers. In response, the visiting monk held up three fingers. The one-eyed monk held up his fist. When the visiting monk saw this, he dashed out of the garden to tell the old monk his decision.

He came upon the old monk at his chores and gasped, "I do not deserve to stay here! I am unworthy of being a fellow student with the enlightened young monk I met in the garden!"

The old monk paused in his work and asked incredulously, "Are you speaking of the young one-eyed monk in the garden?"

"Yes!" exclaimed the visitor. "His knowledge is far superior to mine. I will humbly leave."

"Please tell me what happened in the garden," said the old monk, wide-eyed with amazement.

The visitor explained, "I approached the venerable monk and decided to

converse in sign language. I held up one finger to indicate the Buddha. Whereupon he held up two fingers to indicate the Buddha and his teaching, the *Dharma*. I persevered in the discussion, however, and held up three fingers to show the Buddha, the *Dharma*, and the *Sangha*, the community. Then he revealed the limitations of my understanding. He held up his fist to show me that they all are one. I immediately ran here to tell you I must leave." With a sigh, he turned and left the temple.

A moment later the young one-eyed monk stumbled into the temple. He grumbled and shouted, "Where is that scoundrel? How dare he insult me!"

"Calm your temper," said the old monk. "Please tell me what happened in the garden."

The young monk explained, "I was peacefully meditating when that rude visitor interrupted my concentration. When I looked up at him, he held up one finger, indicating that I have only one eye. I held up two fingers, politely congratulating him that he has two eyes. Then he insulted me further! He held up three fingers, pointing out that there were only three eyes among us. I could bear it no longer. I raised my fist to punch him in the nose and he ran away!"