

良寛の俳句

Ryōkan (1758-1831): *The Complete Haiku*

English version by Gabor Terebess

A Japanese monk of the Sōtō school of zen during the Edo period. After receiving a Confucian education (see Confucianism) in his youth, he turned aside from the path of governmental work laid out by his father and entered the Sōtō order at 18. This was a period in which, under the influence of Chinese Ts'ao-tung monks, the Sōtō school was undergoing a wave of reform, and many were advocating strict regimens of meditation and the study of Sōtō founder Dōgen's works. Ryōkan fell in with this reformist programme, and studied with several strict and uncompromising masters. In 1792, he received word that his father had travelled to Kyoto to present a work to the government denouncing political intrigue and corruption, and had then committed suicide, apparently to call attention to his protest. Ryōkan arranged the funeral and subsequent memorial services, and then set out on religious pilgrimage for several years. Only in 1804 did he settle down on Mt. Kugami, where he stayed for twelve years. He is remembered for the depth of his enlightenment that manifested in the spirit of acceptance and equality that he showed to all, from officials to prostitutes. He played with children, composed poetry in praise of nature, was renowned for his calligraphy, lived in extreme simplicity, and showed love for all living things to the extent of placing lice under his robes (see *cīvara*) to keep them warm, allowing thieves to take freely from his possessions, and letting one leg protrude from his mosquito net at night to give the mosquitos food.

Buddhism Dictionary

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1

あをみたる
なかにこぶしの
花ざかり

aomitaru
naka ni kobushi no
hanazakari

**in dense green
a magnolia flower
in full bloom**

2

あきかぜに
独り立ちたる
姿かな

aki kaze ni
hitori dachitaru
sugata kana

**in the autumn wind
standing alone
a shadow**

3

秋高し
木立はふりぬ
籬かな

akitakashi
kodachi wa furinu
magaki kana

**clear autumn sky
thicket of old trees
hedgerow**

4

秋は高し
木立はふりぬ
このやかた

aki wa takashi
kodachi wa furinu
kono yakata

**clear autumn sky
thicket of old trees
and this hut!**

5

秋ひより
せむ羽すずめの
はをとかな

aki hiyori
senba suzume no
haoto kana

**clear autumn sky
sparrows thousands
sound of wings**

6

あげ巻の
昔をしのぶ
すみれ草

agemaki no
mukashi o shinobu
sumire sô

**tender memory
hairdressing children
violets in bloom**

7

あけ窓の
むかしをしのぶ
すぐれ夢

ake mado no
mukashi o shinobu
sugure yume

**open window
the past comes back
better than a dream**

8

雨もりや
また寝るとこの
さむさかな

amamori ya
mata nerutoko no
samusa kana

**leaky roof
my bed again
wet and icy**

9

あめのふる
日はあはれなり
良寛坊

ame no furu
hi wa aware nari
Ryôkan bo

**on rainy days
the monk Ryokan
feels sorry for himself**

10

新しいけや
かはずとびこむ
音もなし

araike ya
kawazu tobikomu
oto mo nashi

**the new pond
a frog jumps in
no splashing**

11

いきせきと
升りて来るや
鱒うり

ikiseki to
noborite kuru ya
iwashi uri

**gasping for air
the fishmonger in sweat
climbed up here**

12

いくつれか
鷺のとびゆく
あきのくれ

ikutsure ka
sagi no tobi yuku
aki no kure

**all small groups
herons in the sky
autumn dusk**

13

いくむれか
およいで行くや
いわしうり

ikumure ka
oyoide yuku ya
iwashi uri

**going forward
in zigzag
the fishmonger**

14

いざさらば
あつさを忘れ
盆踊

iza saraba
atsusa o wasure
bonodori

**let's go!
forget the heat
Bon dance**

15

いささらば
我も返らん
あきの暮

iza saraba
ware mo kaeran
aki no kure

**let's go, that's it!
I am leaving too
autumn dusk**

16

稲舟や
さし行方や
三日の月

inabune ya
sashiyuku kata ya
mikka no tsuki

**riceboat
goes straight to
the crescent moon**

17

鶯に
ゆめさまされし
朝げかな

uguisu ni
yumesama sareshi
asage kana

**a bush warbler
singing me out of a dream
rice in the morning**

18

鶯や
百人なから
気かつかす

uguisu ya
hyakunin nagara
kigatsukazu

**a bush warbler
not a man in a hundred's
aware of it**

19

うらばたけ
はにふのかきの
やぶれから

urabatake
hanifu no kaki no
yabure kara

**the next garden
through a gaping hole
in the clay wall**

20

老翁が
身は寒に理
雪の竹

rôô ga
mi wa samu ni uzu
yuki no take

**old man
winter's cold embrace
snow-bound bamboo**

21

可惜虚
空に馬を
放ちけり

oshimubeshi
kokû ni uma o
hanachi keru

**so sad to see
a stray mare
alone in the fields**

22

おちつけば
ここも廬山の
時雨哉

ochitsukeba
koko mo Rozan no
shigure kana

**great peace
here as in Rozan
autumn mist**

23

同じくば
はなのもとにて
一とよねむ

onajiku ba
hana no moto nite
hitoyo nen

**fell asleep
under cherry blossoms
just one night**

24

かきつばた
我れこの亭に
酔ひにけり

kakitsubata
ware kono tei ni
yoini keru

**iris petal
leaning against my hut
made me drunk**

25

柿もぎの
きん玉寒し
秋の風

kakimogi no
kintama samushi
aki no kaze

**persimmon-gathering
my balls are cold
in the fall wind**

26

顔回が
うちものゆかし
瓢かな

Gankai ga
uchimono yukashi
fukube kana

**as valuable
as the sword of Ganka
my gourd!**

27

来ては打ち
行きてはたたく
夜もすがら

kite wa uchi
yukite wa tatau
yomosugara

**coming I clap
returning I knock
the night through**

28

きませきみ
いが栗落ちし
みちよけて

kimase kimi
igakuri ochi shi
michi yokete

**coming up here
walk round chestnut burrs
on the ground**

29

けふこすは
あすはちりなむ
うめのはな

kyô kosu ba
asu wa chirinan
ume no hana

**still on the branch
today - but tomorrow -
plum blossoms**

30

こがねもて
いざ杖かはむ
さみつ坂

kogane mote
iza tsue kawan
Samizusaka

**my last pennies
for a stick now
Mount Samizu**

31

木枯しを
馬上ににらむ
男哉

kogarashi o
bajô ni niramu
otoko kana

**cold winter wind
with rigid glance
a horseman**

32

この人の
背中に踊り
できるなり

kono hito no
senaka ni odori
dekirunari

**this woman
dancing on her broad back
we could almost!**

33

この宮や
こぶしのはなに
ちるさくら

kono miya ya
kobushi no hana ni
chiru sakura

**in the sanctuary
fell on the magnolia
cherry blossoms!**

34

子らや子ら
子らが手を取
躑躅かな

koraya kora
kora ga te o toru
tsutsuji kana

**come on, kids!
azaleas want
your harmful hands**

35

さわぐ子の
とる智慧はなし
はつほたる

sawagu ko no
toru chie wa nashi
hatsu hotaru

**chattering children
never catch
the first firefly**

36

柴垣に
小鳥あつまる
ゆきのあさ

shibagaki ni
kotori atsumaru
yuki no asa

**hedge branches
young birds are raised
morning snow**

37

柴焼て>
しくれ聞夜と
なりにけり

shiba yaite
shigure kiku yo to
nari ni keru

**burning wood
night is falling
with rain**

38

柴の戸に
つゆのたまりや
今朝のあさ

shiba no to ni
tsuyu no tamari ya
kesa no asa

**on my door knob
a pearl of dew
early morning**

39

涼しさを
忘れまひそや
今年竹

suzushisa o
wasuremai zo ya
kotoshidake

**cooling green
do not forget
bamboo of the year**

40

すまでの
むかしを問へば
やまざくら

Sumadera no
mukashi o toeba
yamazakura

**Suma temple
for its history
ask the wild cherry tree**

41

青嵐
吸物は
白牡丹

seiran
suimono wa
shiro botan

**summer wind
brings into my soup
a white peony**

42

そめいろの
をとつれつげよ
よるのかり

Someiro no
otozure tsugeyo
yoru no kari

**about Someiro
tell me all you know
wild geese in the evening**

43

たかつきに
向かふあしたの
寒さかな

takatsuki ni
mukau ashita no
samusa kana

**at dawn
before my eating tray
sitting in the cold**

44

たくほどは
かぜがもてくる
おちばかな

takuhodo wa
kaze ga motekuru
ochiba kana

**the wind brings enough
of fallen leaves
to make a fire**

45

たふるれは
たふるるままの
庭の草

taorure ba
taoruru mama no
niwa no kusa

**blades go down
and stay laying
garden grass**

46

だれ聞けと
ま菰が原の
行々子

dare kike to
makomo ga hara no
gyôgyôshi

**I am all ears
in wild rice fields
the song of warblers**

47

つとにせむ
よしののさとの
はなかたみ

tsuto ni sen
Yoshino no sato no
hanagatami

**to remember
Yoshino cherry
a basket of flowers**

48

手を振て
およいでゆくや
いはしうり

te o furite
oyoide yuku ya
iwashi uri

**waving his arms
zigzag it in advance
the merchant of sardines**

49

鉄鉢に
明日の米あり
夕涼

tetsubachi ni
asu no kome ari
yûsuzumi

**in the iron bowl
rice for tomorrow
the cool evening!**

50

手拭で
年をかくすや
盆踊

tenuguide
toshi o kakusu
ya bonodori

**headbands
we can hide years
Bon dance**

51

手もたゆく
あふぐ扇の
おきどころ

te mota yuku
ôgu ôgi no
okidokoro

**my tired hand
seeks to find a place
for the fan**

52

なつのよや>
のみをかぞへて
あかしけり

natsu no yo ya
nomi o kazoete
akashikeri

**summer night
to count all my fleas
until dawn**

53

なへみがく
おとにまぎるる
雨蛙

nabe migaku
oto ni magiruru
amagaeru

**scrub the pot
make louder noise
green frogs**

54

鳩のすの
ところがへする
さつきあめ

nio no su no
tokoro gaesuru
satsuki ame

**grebe's nest
found everywhere
May showers**

55

ぬす人に
取り残されし
窓の月

nusubito ni
tori nokosareshi
mado no tsuki

**shining window
the thief left it behind
the moon**

56

のっぺりと
師走も知らず
今朝の春

nopperi to
shiwazu mo shirazu
kesa no haru

**what a relief!
missed the end of the year
spring morning**

57

のっぽりと
師走も知らず
弥彦山

noppori to
shiwazu mo shirazu
Yahiko yama

**how reckless!
ignores the end of the year
Mount Yahiko**

58

萩すすき
露のほるまで
なかめはや

hagi susuki
tsuyu no boru made
nakame baya

**bush clover pampas grass
desire to contemplate
until dew formed**

59

萩すすき
わが行く道の
しるべせよ

hagi susuki
waga yuku michi no
shirubeseyo

**bush clover pampas grass
all along my path
so familiar!**

60

はちたたき
昔も今も
鉢叩き

hachi tataki
mukashi mo ima mo
hachi tataki

**hitting beating
as before and now
hitting my bowl**

61

初時雨
名もなき山の
おもしろき

hatsu shigure
na mo naki yama no
omoshiroki

**the first drizzle
a mountain without name
it is fun!**

62

はるさめや
門松の注連
ゆるみけり

harusame ya
kadomatsu no shime
yurumi keru

**spring rain
the New Year *shime*
hung out**

63

はるさめや
静かになでる
やれふくへ

harusame ya
shizukani naderu
yarefukube

**spring rain
I tenderly caress
my cracked gourd**

64

春さめや
友をたつぬる
おもやあり

harusame ya
tomo o tazunuru
omoya ari

**spring rain
wish to visit a friend
today**

65

人の来て
またも頭巾を
ぬがせけり

hito no kite
mata mo zukin o
nugase keru

**someone has come
once again
remove my bonnet**

66

人のみな
ねぶたき時の
ぎやうぎやう

hito no mina
nebutaki toki no
gyôgyôshi

**like all of us
when falling asleep
the song of warblers**

67

日々々に
時雨の降れば
人老い

hibi hibi ni
shigure no fureba
hito oinu

**day by day by day
drizzly cold rain
getting old**

68

火貰ひに
橋越へてゆく
小夜時雨

hi morai ni
hashi koete yuku
sayo shigure

**gathering twigs
then crossing the bridge
in the evening mist**

69

昼顔や
とちらの露の
情やら

hirugao ya
dochira no tsuyu no
nasake yara

**morning glory
dew formed on each bell
as expected**

70

昼日中
真菰の中の
行々子

hiru hi naka
makomo no naka no
gyôgyôshi

**noon hours
in the wild rice fields
the song of warblers**

71

風鈴や
竹を去ること
二三尺

fûrin ya
take o saru koto
ni san shaku

**windbells
rock beyond the bamboo
two or three feet**

72

冬川や
峰より鷲の
にらみけり

fuyu gawa ya
mine yori washi no
nirami keru

**river in winter
soaring over peaks
an eagle spots its prey**

73

平生の
身持ちにほしや
風呂上がり

heizei no
mimochi ni hoshi ya
furo agari

**never
felt so good
out of the hot tub!**

74

ほろ酔の
あしもと軽し
春のかぜ

horoyoi no
ashimoto karushi
haru no kaze

**like drunk
a light step forward
in spring wind**

75

摩頂して
ひとりだちけり
秋のかぜ

machô shite
hitori dachi keri
aki no kaze

**the peak reached
lonely I stands
the winds of autumn**

76

真昼中
ほろりほろりと
けしのはな>

mahiru naka
horori horori to
keshi no hana

**at midday
appear everywhere
poppy flowers**

77

水の面に
あや織りみだる
はるのあめ

mizu no mo ni
ayaori midaru
haru no ame

**the surface of the water
like ornate silk
spring rain**

78

名月や
けいとう花も
によつきによつき

meigetsu ya
keitô hana mo
nyoki nyoki

**at full moon
flowering cockscombs
appear everywhere**

79

名月や
庭のはせをと
せいくらべ

meigetsu ya
niwa no bashô to
sei kurabe

**at full moon
measure myself against
Basho
in my garden**

80

もみち葉の
錦のあきや
唐衣

momijiba no
nishiki no aki ya
karagoromo

**autumn - a brocade
of red maple leaves -
Tang dress**

81

屋根引の
金玉しほむ
秋の風

yanebiki no
kintama shibomu
aki no kaze

**repairing the roof
my balls are cold
in the fall wind**

82

やま里は
蛙の声に
なりにけり

yamazato wa
kaeru no koe ni
nari ni keru

**mountain hamlet
drowned in croaking
green frogs**

83

山しぐれ
酒やの蔵に
波深し

yamashigure
sakaya no kura ni
nami fukashi

**mountain rain
in *sake* warehouse
deep puddles**

84

山は花
酒や酒やの
杉ばやし

yama wa hana
sakeya sakeya no
sugibayashi

**mountain in bloom
a single cry: *sake, sake!*
the woods ring with it**

85

ゆふせむと
くさのまくらに
留守のあむ

yûzen to
kusa no makura ni
rusu no an

**perfect calm
on a grass pillow
far from my hut**

86

雪しろの
かかる芝生の
つくづくし

yukishiru no
kakarû shibafu no
tsukuzukushi

**slush
on the grass
growing horsetail**

87

雪しろの
よする古野の
つくづくし

yukishiru no
yosuru furu ya no
tsukuzukushi

**slush
spreads on the old field
growing horsetail**

88

雪しろや
古野にかかる
つくづくし

yukishiru ya
furu ya ni kakaru
tsukuzukushi

**slush
reveals an old field
growing horsetail**

89

ゆくあきの
あはれを誰に
かたらまし

yuku aki no
aware o dare ni
katara mashi

**about the pathos
of departing autumn
whom can I tell?**

90

ゆめさめて
聞くは蛙の
遠音かな

yume samete
kiku wa kawazu no
tône kana

**out of my dreams
the distant croaking
green frogs**

91

酔ひふしの
ところはここか
蓮の花

yoi fushi no
tokorowa koko ka
basu no hana

**where to doze off
in this drunken state
the lotus flower**

92

宵暗や
せむざいはただ
虫の声

yoiyamiya
senzai wa tada
mushi no koe

**nightfall
only singing insects
in the garden**

93

よしや寝む
すまのうらわの
なみまくら

yoshi ya nen
Suma no urawa no
nami makura

**what fun! sleep
on the shores of Suma
waves as a pillow!**

94

よそはでも
かほはしろいぞ
よめがきみ

yoso wa demo
kao wa shiroizo
yome ga kimi

**without powder
the whiteness of your face
bride!**

95

世の中は
さくらの花に
なりけり

yo no naka wa
sakura no hana
ni nari keri

**all around us
the world is more than
cherry blossoms**

96

留守の戸に
ひとり淋しき
散り松葉

rusu no to ni
hitori sabishiki
chiri matsuba

**sad and lonely
before a closed door
pine needles**

97

わがこひは
ふくへてとしょうを
おすことし

waga koi wa
fukube de dojô o
osu gotoshi

**loach from gourd
slipping old hand
love as well**

98

わが宿へ
つれて行きたし
蓮に鳥

waga yado e
tsurete yukitashi
hasu ni tori

**up to my hut
I accompany
the lotus bird**

99

われよびて
故郷へ行や
夜の雁

ware yobite
kokyô e yuku ya
yoru no kari

**geese call me
fly home with them
in the night**

100

裏を見せ (うらを見せ)
表を見せて (おもてを見せて)
散る紅葉 (散るもみじ)

ura o mise
omote o misete
chiru momiji

**showing back
showing front
maple leaves fall**

101

散る桜
残る桜も
散る桜

chiru sakura
nokoru sakura mo
chiru sakura

**scattering sakura
remaining sakura also
scattering sakura**

**falling cherry blossoms
those remaining
also will fall**

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kimase kimi / igakuri ochi shi / michi yokete

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kite wa uchi / yukite wa tataku / yomosugara

30

kogane mote / iza tsue kawan / Samizusaka

31

kogarashi o / bajō ni niramu / otoko kana

32

kono hito no / senaka ni odori / dekirunari

33

kono miya ya / kobushi no hana ni / chiru sakura

34

koraya kora / kora ga te o toru / tsutsuji kana

29

kyō kosu ba / asu wa chirinan / ume no hana

75

machō shite / hitori dachi keru / aki no kaze

76

mahiru naka / horori horori to / keshi no hana

78

meigetsu ya / keitō hana mo / nyoki nyoki

79

meigetsu ya / niwa no bashō to / sei kurabe

77

mizu no mo ni / ayaori midaru / haru no ame

80

momijiba no / nishiki no aki ya / karagoromo

53

nabe migaku / oto ni magiruru / amagaeru

52

natsu no yo ya / nomi o kazoete / akashikeri

54

nio no su no / tokoro gaesuru / satsuki ame

56

nopperi to / shiwasu mo shirazu / kesa no haru

57

noppori to / shiwasu mo shirazu / Yahiko yama

55

nusubito ni / tori nokosareshi / mado no tsuki

22

ochitsukeba / koko mo Rozan no / shigure kana

23

onajiku ba / hana no moto nite / hitoyo nen

21

oshimubeshi / kokū ni uma o / hanachi keru

20

rōō ga / mi wa samu ni uzu / yuki no take

96

rusu no to ni / hitori sabishiki / chiri matsuba

35

sawagu ko no / toru chie wa nashi / hatsu hotaru

41

seiran / suimono wa / shiro botan

36

shibagaki ni / kotori atsumaru / yuki no asa

38

shiba no to ni / tsuyu no tamari ya / kesa no asa

37

shiba yaite / shigure kiku yo to / nari ni keru

42

Someiro no / otozure tsugeyo / yoru no kari

40

Sumadera no / mukashi o toeba / yamazakura

39

suzushisa o / wasuremai zo ya / kotoshidake

43

takatsuki ni / mukau ashita no / samusa kana

44

takuhodo wa / kaze ga motekuru / ochiba kana

45

taorure ba / taoruru mama no / niwa no kusa

51

te mota yuku / ōgu ōgi no / okidokoro

50

tenuguide / toshi o kakusu / ya bonodori

48

te o furite / oyoide yuku ya / iwashi uri

49

tetsubachi ni / asu no kome ari / yūsuzumi

47

tsuto ni sen / Yoshino no sato no / hanagatami

17

uguisu ni / yumesama sareshi / asage kana

18

uguisu ya / hyakunin nagara / kigatsukazu

19

urabatake / hanifu no kaki no / yabure kara

100

ura o mise / omote o misete / chiru momiji

97

waga koi wa / fukube de dojō o / osu gotoshi

98

waga yado e / tsurete yukitashi / hasu ni tori

99

ware yobite / kokyō e yuku ya / yoru no kari

83

yamashigure / sakaya no kura ni / nami fukashi

84

yama wa hana / sakeya sakeya no / sugibayashi

82

yamazato wa / kaeru no koe ni / nari ni keru

81

yanebiki no / kintama shibomu / aki no kaze

91

yoi fushi no / tokorowa koko ka / basu no hana

92

yoiyamiya / senzai wa tada / mushi no koe

95

yo no naka wa / sakura no hana / ni nari keru

93

yoshi ya nen / Suma no urawa no / nami makura

94

yoso wa demo / kao wa shiroizo / yome ga kimi

86

yukishiru no / kakaru shibafu no / tsukuzukushi

87

yukishiru no / yosuru furu ya no / tsukuzukushi

88

yukishiru ya / furu ya ni kakaru / tsukuzukushi

89

yuku aki no / aware o dare ni / katara mashi

90

yume samete / kiku wa kawazu no / tōne kana

85

yūzen to / kusa no makura ni / rusu no an

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YAMAMOTO RYŌKAN (1758-1831), Haiku tr. by Michael Haldane
<http://www.michaelhaldane.com/HaikuNonJapanese.htm>

autumn wind -
a figure
standing alone

first winter-rain -
a nameless mountain
quaintly

in the begging-bowl
tomorrow's rice -
evening breeze

**yūsuzumi*: cooling oneself in the evening after work and the heat of the Japanese summer day.

the poignancy
of closing autumn, whom
to tell?

when everyone
wants to sleep -
reed-warblers

**gyōgyōshi*: 'exaggerated'. It refers to the sound made by the yoshikiri (reed-warbler).

bring tidings
from Mt. Shumi,
eventide wild geese

*Mt. Shumi: at the centre of the Buddhist paradise. *Ryōkan* is requesting the migrating wild geese to return from the West with news of his father.

fallen
still
garden plants

* * *

Ryokan (1758-1831)

Ryokan was born in 1758, the first son in a noble family in Izumozaki in the Echigo District. He entered the priesthood at the age of 18 and was given the Buddhist name "Ryokan" when he was 22 years old. He kept searching for the ultimate truths through his life. Learning the Chinese classics and poetry at Entsu Temple of the Soto Sect in Tamashima in the Bichu District, he practiced hard asceticism under Priest Kokusen for 20 years. After this, he traveled all over the country on foot and returned to his home village just before the age of 40. He lived at the Gogoan hut in Kokujo Temple on Mt. Kugami, and then moved down to a thatched hut in Otoko Shrine at the foot of the Mountain. It is said that he enjoyed writing traditional Japanese poetry, Chinese poetry and calligraphy all through his simple, carefree and unselfish life. He was also called "Temari-Shonin (The Priest who Plays with a Temari ball)" and was much loved by children, since he often played with a Temari ball (Japanese cotton-wound ball), Ohajiki (small glass counters for playing games) together with children in the mountain village. Much of his poetry and letters which still remain, all of which are full of his sympathy and affection for children, describe his joyful times with children and also reveal his high personal qualities as a man who devoted his life to meditation. Ryokan was a Zen priest, but he never established his own temple, and lived by alms. Instead of preaching, he enjoyed companionship and conversation with many ordinary people. In 1831, he ended his 74-year life as an honest priest respected and loved by all he knew.

* * *

Ryokan is a man who has many stories told about him. He is famous for spending his days playing "hide and seek" and traditional Japanese ball games ("temari") with children.

One day a bamboo shoot sprouted from below the floor of his hermitage and grew up to the ceiling. As Ryokan used a candle to burn a hole in the ceiling for the bamboo shoot to grow out, he accidentally burned the hut to the ground.

Ryokan also composed poems and songs, and was skilled in calligraphy. People tried to get him to write poems when they happened to find him, but Ryokan would never write anything for them. This is why the writings that still exist are so popular and expensive. I have heard that almost all of the writings with Ryokan's signature which appear on the market are actually counterfeit.

This story about Ryokan is also well known. In Ryokan's last years, a beautiful young nun visited his hermitage frequently and they composed and exchanged love poems with each other. When an earthquake occurred at Echigo-Sanjo, he sent a strange letter that said "It is good to suffer a misfortune when suffering a misfortune."

Another famous story has to do with Ryokan as a child. He was scolded by his father, who told him "If you make a funny face you will turn into a flounder." Ryokan was very worried about being able to make it to the sea in time when he turned into the fish, so he waited on a rock on the seashore for a long time.

Ryokan (1758-1831) lived in the same age as the haiku poet Issa Kobayashi (born in 1763), through the reigns of Bunka to Bunsei, at the end of the Edo era. Ryokan died in 1831(2nd year of Tenpo), just 37 years before the Meiji Restoration. This time was almost the beginning of the modern age. It was the same time that Mozart (1756-1796) was active in the West. The way of life in those days can still be seen at a small, poor hermitage ("Gogo-an") on Mt. Kugami in Echigo where Ryokan lived for 20 years, the longest time that he spent in one place. I sometimes visit there and chant sutras with around 20 other Buddhists of the Soto sect, the last time being around 2 years ago. It was 20 years ago that I first visited.

The day after my life at Eihei temple ended I left for Mt. Kugami. A man whom I met at the Eihei temple's Unsui ascetic exercises gave me a lift to the mountain and a bed to sleep in. From the bottom of mountain I climbed the path, which is similar to the one at Eihei temple, to the small hermitage. Everyone who went to this hermitage was astonished. "This is the place where the famous Ryokan lived? How did he stand the cold winter and live such a long life?" Ryokan lived to be 74 years old, which was very old at that time, even though he had a weak constitution ever since he was young.

『Kanjinjikiribun』 is a sentence where Rokan's beliefs are pointed out clearly. It means "A priest must fulfill their duty by religious austerities."

"Religious austerities" means that a priest chants a sutra called "kadozuke" from house to house and does an act of charity. In turn, the house contributes a small amount of something in the house, such as rice or grain. Both parties treasure the spirit of mutual aid that results from giving to each other. This has been a traditional form of Buddhism since Buddhism was created. It is an important precept of Buddhism that religious austerities must be done indiscriminately, to both rich and poor houses. 「乞食 Kotsujiki」 in Buddhism and 「乞食 kojiki」 use the same Chinese characters, but the meanings are as different as Heaven and Earth. We call this lifestyle "Jomyoshoku" (the innocent food of a priest) .

Ryokan manifested the meaning of Buddhist precepts in his life, and not only in his words. Because of this, everyone who came into contact with him was educated in Buddhist ways, without even speaking to him. A curious story about Ryokan says that even though he did not preach or recommend good conduct when he stayed as a guest in someone's house, the atmosphere naturally became peaceful and the family happy. The house was also enveloped in a sweet smell for a few days after Ryokan left.

<http://onebowl.shousouji.com/english/ryokan2.html>

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The Way of the Holy Fool

What a monk can teach us about living, laughing, and child's play

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Larry Smith Parabola

*At the crossroads this year, after
begging all day
I lingered at the village temple.
Children gather round me and
whisper,
'The crazy monk has come back
to play.'*

—Taigu Ryokan

Taigu Ryokan lives on as one of Japan's best-loved poets, the wise fool who wrote of his humble life with directness. Born in 1758, he is part of a tradition of radical Zen poets, or 'great fools,' that includes China's Han-shan and P'ang Yun (Layman P'ang) and Japan's Ikkyu Sojun and Hakuin Ekaku.

The eldest of seven children, Ryokan grew up near Mount Kugami in the town of Izumozaki, a community for artists and writers. His father, a scholar of Japanese literature and a renowned haiku poet, was the town's ineffectual mayor. His mother was a quiet woman who eventually had to deal with her husband's abandoning his position and his family and then drowning himself in the river Katsura.

In his youth, Ryokan trained under a Confucian scholar and began to study Chinese literature in the original. At 16, he had already flirted with a life of gambling and women, then surprised everyone by taking up the study of Soto Zen at the nearby Koshoji temple. (Soto and Rinzaï comprise the two main schools of Japanese Zen Buddhism.) He shaved his head and took his robes and vows. At 21, he moved to the Entsuji temple in Bitchu, but eventually became disillusioned and outraged at the corrupt practices of vain and greedy temple priests and left to make his mountain hermitage.

Ryokan had no disciples and ran no temple; in the eyes of the world he was a penniless monk who spent his life in the snow country of Mount Kugami. He admired most of the teachings of Dogen, the 13th century monk who first brought Soto Zen to Japan. He was also drawn to the unconventional life and poetry of the Zen mountain poet Han-shan, who lived in China sometime during the T'ang Dynasty (618 to 907). He repeatedly refused to be honored or confined as a 'professional,' either as a Buddhist priest or as a poet. He wrote:

*Who says my poems are poems?
These poems are not poems.
When you can understand this,
then we can begin to speak of poetry.*

Ryokan never published a collection of verse while he was alive. His practice consisted of sitting in *zazen* meditation, walking in the woods, playing with children, making his daily begging rounds, reading and writing poetry, doing calligraphy, and on occasion drinking wine with friends.

Ryokan later dubbed himself *Taigu*, or 'Great Fool,' but this title had a special meaning. A Zen master who taught the young Ryokan described him this way: 'Ryokan looks like a fool, but his way of life is an entirely emancipated one. He lives on playing, so to say, with his destiny, liberating himself from every kind of fetter.' He went on to describe his disciple's simple life: 'In the morning he wanders out of his hut and goes God knows where and in the evening loiters around somewhere. For fame he cares nothing. Men's cunning ways he puts out of the question.' His freewheeling spirit had much in common with the American writer Henry David Thoreau's. Ryokan's life was an affirmation of alternate values and a rebuke to the hypocrisy and rigid values found in Japanese Zen monasteries and in society at large.

His 'foolishness' belongs in a Taoist-Buddhist context as an inversion of social norms. Ryokan declares the Way of the Fool in his poem 'No Mind':

*With no mind, flowers lure the
butterfly;
With no mind, the butterfly visits
the blossoms.
Yet when flowers bloom, the butterfly
comes;
When the butterfly comes, the
flowers bloom.*

'No mind,' or *mushin*, means not to cling or to strive, and when it is joined with *mujo*, or acceptance of life's impermanence, we have the greatness of the fool.

To achieve this original or beginner's mind, Ryokan sought the company of children, kept his humble begging rounds, accepted his everyday life, and recorded it all in his authentic poems. Dropping whatever he was doing, he would turn to join the children's games of tag and blindman's buff, hide-and-seek, and 'grass fights.' He was once caught playing marbles with a geisha and is said never to have refused a game of Go. He relished playing dead for the children, who would bury him in leaves, and he would spend the day picking flowers with them, forgetting his begging rounds.

The stories of Ryokan's playfulness are legendary. Here's one, preserved after his death in 1831 in Ryokan's family archive:

'Ryokan was playing hide-and-seek, and when it came his turn to hide, he looked around for a spot where the children wouldn't find him. Noticing a tall haystack, he crawled inside, concealing himself completely in the hay. No matter how hard they searched, the children couldn't find him. Soon they

grew tired of playing, the sun began to set, and when they saw the smoke rising from the dinner fires, they deserted Ryokan and returned to their homes. Unaware of this, Ryokan imagined the children were still searching for him. Thinking, 'Here they come to look for me! Now they're going to find me,' he waited and waited. He waited all night and was still waiting when dawn arrived. In farmhouses, in the morning the kitchen hearth is lit by burning bundles of hay, and when the farmer's daughter came to fetch some of these, she was startled to find Ryokan hiding in the haystack. 'Ryokan! What in the world are you doing here?' she cried. 'Shh!' Ryokan warned her, 'The children will find me.'

His tendency to misplace things—his walking stick, his begging bowl, books, even his underwear—was well known. Among the stories of his chronic forgetfulness is one of a visit by the famous scholar Kameda Bosai. When Bosai found Ryokan sitting *zazen* on the porch of his hut, he waited—several hours—for the monk to finish, and then Bosai and Ryokan happily talked poetry, philosophy, and writing until evening, when Ryokan rose to fetch them some *sake* from town.

Again Bosai waited several hours, then grew concerned and began to walk toward the village. When he found his host a hundred yards away, sitting under a pine tree, he exclaimed, 'Ryokan! Where have you been? I've been waiting for hours and was afraid something had happened to you.' Ryokan looked up. 'Bosai, you have just come in time. Look, isn't the moon splendid tonight?' When Bosai asked about the *sake*, Ryokan replied, 'Oh, yes, the *sake*. I forgot all about it,' and headed off to town. To be distracted by life's moments is indeed a Zen virtue, though it is often a trial for friends.

Ryokan often wrote in the *Kanshi* form—poems composed in classical Chinese. Taken together, his *Kanshi* poems are best seen as an undated journal, a record of a humble life spent living in the moment without thoughts of fame and power. In recording his experience of play, begging, observing people and nature, and accepting life's bounty, Ryokan becomes the self-deprecating great fool in order to mentor us in an authentic life of simplicity, trust, humility, and finding the true way in everyday life.