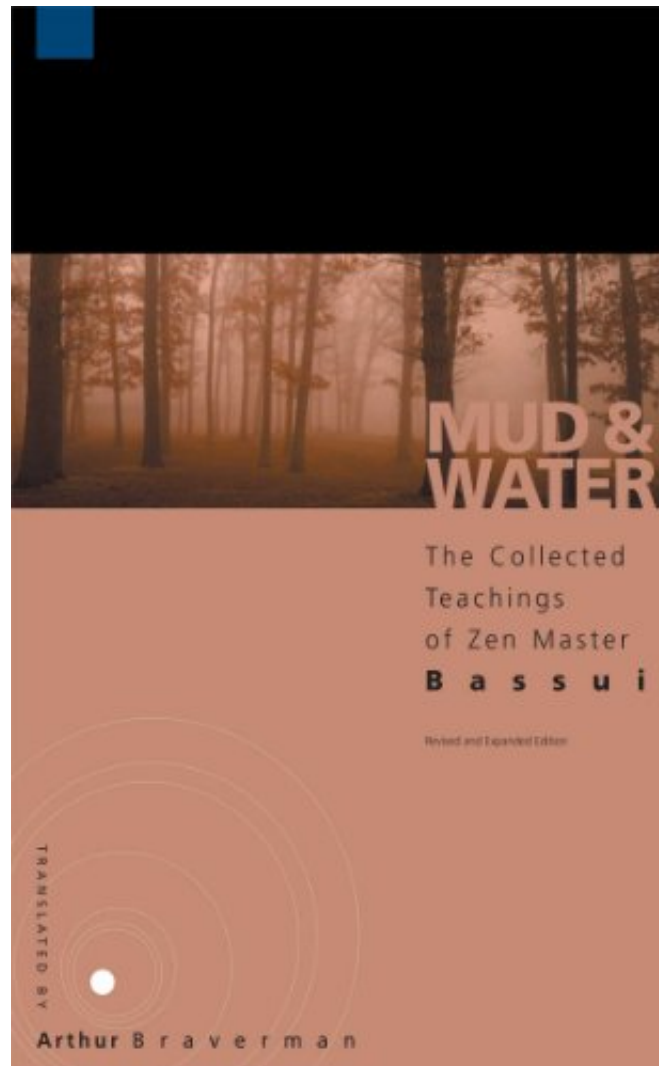


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Mud and Water: The Collected Teachings of Zen Master Bassui

by
Arthur Braverman



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Synopsis

The fourteenth-century Zen master Bassui was recognized as one of the most important Zen teachers of his time. Accessible and eloquent, these teachings cut to the heart of the great matter of Zen, pointing directly to the importance of seeing our own original nature and recognizing it as Buddhahood itself. Bassui is taking familiar concepts in Buddhism and recasting them in an essential Zen light. Though he lived centuries ago in a culture vastly different from our own, Zen Master Bassui speaks with a voice that spans time and space to address our own modern challenges - in our lives and spiritual practice. Like the revered Master Dogen several generations before him, Bassui was dissatisfied with what passed for Zen training, and taught a radically reenergized form of Zen, emphasizing deep and direct penetration into one's own true nature. And also like Dogen, Bassui uses powerful and often poetic language to take familiar Buddhist concepts recast them in a radically non-dual Zen light, making ancient doctrines vividly relevant. This edition of *Mud and Water* contains several teachings never before translated.

Look inside the book

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Index Acknowledgments THANKS TO Ralph Edsell, Anne Forer, Peter Haskel, Doug Honeyman, Surya Dass Miller, Richard Kortum, and Hanalore Rosset for reading sections of the translation and offering many useful suggestions; to Professor Kiyoshi Hoshi for the use of his photographs relating to Bassui's life and for making his comprehensive research on Bassui available to me; to Ichiro Shirato Sensei for teaching me how to read Japanese; to Hiroko Sanada Braverman for answering countless questions regarding difficult passages in the text; and to our daughter, Nao, for her ability to understand from age two that when Daddy is at the typewriter, it is time to find another playmate.

Preface to the New Edition IT HAS BEEN over ten years since the publication of the translation of Bassui's *Enzanwadeigassui-sh* ²à When Josh Bartok from Wisdom Publications asked me if I had any books no longer in print, I immediately thought of a new and expanded addition of the teachings of Bassui. The record of Bassui's teaching was my first published translation of Japanese classical Zen texts and still my most cherished. The *Enzanwadeigassui-sh* ° published under the English title of *Mud and Water* is the most comprehensive text of Bassui's talks. Still, there is more to this unique Zen figure. With the addition of some of his letters to monks, nuns, and laypersons and his talk on questioning your mind, we get a more complete picture of Bassui's teachings. The extensive research on Bassui by the late Professor Kiyoshi Hoshi has helped me greatly in revising this translation. Finally I would like to thank Diana and Richard St. Ruth, publishers of *Buddhism Now* for their generous support of my work in general and for letting me use the Bassui letters I'd previously published in *Buddhism Now*. Arthur Braverman Ojai, California 1/21/02

Introduction THE ENZANWADEIGASSUI-SH (A Collection of Mud and Water SHU from Enzan, hereafter referred to as the *Wadegassui*) is a series of talks between the fourteenth-century Zen master Bassui Tokushō and his disciples—monks, nuns, and laypeople. Since it records the questions of his disciples and Bassui's responses to them, these are not Dharma talks in the formal sense, but rather the informal teaching of Bassui as he responds to the questions of his disciples in an attempt to clear up their doubts. Sometimes his responses are short, direct, and spontaneous. At other times he seems to use the question as a springboard to crucial aspects of the teaching. Through these exchanges we see not only the teaching method of a mature Zen master, but also the religious beliefs and superstitions held by fourteenth-century Japanese at a time when Japan was afflicted by civil war. Though the disciples' backgrounds were diverse and their perspectives quite varied, Bassui always managed to bring the students back to what he considered the essence of Zen: seeing into one's own nature. Bassui's ability to connect these diverse questions to this central theme in Zen and to make the complex Buddhist doctrines comprehensible to monks and laypersons is what makes him unique as a Zen master. Bassui uses illustrative examples when questioned about popular sutras of the time. When queried about sections of the Lotus Sutra, the Amida Sutra, and the Sutra of the Bodhisattva Jizō he shows how they all express the one teaching: "Seeing into one's own nature is Buddhahood." Indeed, he reduces the Six Perfections of the Prajñāramitā Sutra to this one truth. Moreover, his verbal acrobatics are always coupled with a true passion, which would impress upon his disciples the urgent need to look into their own nature. And it is this ability to express his understanding with such clarity and passion that drew monks and laypeople to him in droves. When asked how one goes about seeing into his own nature, Bassui would ask the student to inquire into the one who is asking the question—"the one who is speaking right now." This approach did not originate with Bassui. But here again it is Bassui's way of focusing on this one question to the exclusion of all else that gives his Zen its unique flavor. And since Bassui himself had been tormented by this question throughout his life as a seeker, it is perhaps not surprising that it was to become the central theme of his

teaching. To understand the foundation from which this teaching grew, we should first look into Bassui's life and practice up to the time he became the mature teacher we see in the *Wadeigassui*. **BASSUI'S LIFE** Bassui Tokushū was born in Nakamura, a district in the province of Sagami, in what is now Kanagawa prefecture, in 1327, on the sixth day of the tenth month.¹ His family name was Fujiwara, but there seems to be no record of the given names of either his father or his mother. He was born during the reign of the Emperor Godaigo (1318–1339), a period when the Hōjō, a military family that virtually ruled over Japan for more than a hundred years, was losing its control over the country. At this time Japan was on the verge of a civil war that would last more than fifty years. Bassui's mother was said to have had a dream that she would give birth to a demon child. Unable to shake off the fear of this omen, she abandoned the newborn Bassui in a nearby field. A family servant found the child there, took him in, and raised him.² When Bassui was four years old, his father died. Three years later, at a memorial service for him, Bassui asked the attending priest how his father could eat the offerings placed on the altar. When told that it was his father's soul that would eat the offerings, he asked, "What is this thing called a soul?" This was the beginning of an inquiry that Bassui was to pursue throughout most of his life. At around nine years old he was horrified by talk of the agonies of the three evil paths.³ He then inquired more deeply into the meaning of soul. After some years, this investigation led him to another question: "Who is the one who sees, hears, and understands?" For long periods of time he sat in meditation, forgetting his own body, until one day he realized there was nothing one could grasp to call the soul. With this new view of the emptiness of all things, Bassui no longer felt the burden of body and mind, and his doubts about the Buddhadharma (the truth; the teaching of the Buddha), for the time being, were cleared up. This period of tranquillity continued until one day he read in a popular book, "The mind is host, the body is guest." Once more doubts began to arise in Bassui. If the mind is host, he thought, then all cannot be void. This host must be the master who sees, hears, and understands that all things are empty. But who then is this master? He could not free himself of this new doubt. At around twenty years of age Bassui went to study under the Zen master *Æ±M* at Jifukuji Temple in his home province, Sagami. He did not shave his head and become a monk, however, until he was twenty-nine. When he did at last officially become a monk, he had little taste for ritual and rejected the superstitions that clothed so many of the religious institutions of his time. He neither wore robes nor recited sutras like other monks. He simply practiced meditation in an uncompromising fashion, oblivious to wind, rain, and cold. This was to be Bassui's way throughout his life as a Zen practitioner.

Friendship with Tokukei There was a monk from Bassui's hometown by the name of Tokukei Jisha who had cut himself off from the world, retiring to the mountains, practicing religious austerities for many years. Hearing of this monk, Bassui decided to pay him a visit. Tokukei, seeing Bassui with head shaved and in laymen's clothes, asked suspiciously, "Why don't you wear monk's robes?" Bassui: I became a monk to understand the great matter of life and death, not to wear Buddhist robes. Tokukei: I see. Then are you looking into the *kō* of the old masters? Bassui: Of course not. How can I appreciate the words of others when I don't even know my own mind? Tokukei: Well, then, how do you approach your religious practice? Bassui: Having become a monk, I want to clarify the source of the great Dharma handed down by the buddhas and the ancestors. After attaining enlightenment, I want to save the bright and the dull, teaching each one according to his capacity. My true desire is to relieve others of their pain though I myself may fall into hell. Hearing this Tokukei simply put his palms together and bowed. A friendship grew between these two monks from that time. Bassui vowed not to preach a word of the Dharma to others until he received certification of his own realization from a true teacher. Once he received such

certification, he would devote his life to saving others. To fulfill this vow he practiced harder than ever, telling himself this doubting mind is after all empty. He carried this investigation as far as he could without any real clarification. Then, one day, after sitting in meditation through the night, the sound of the mountain stream at dawn penetrated his whole body and Bassui suddenly had a realization. He then went in search of a teacher to verify his understanding. Hearing of a well-known Zen master, Kōshō at Mōkoji Temple in Kamakura, Bassui set out to see him. Kōshō confirmed Bassui's understanding. This was sometime in the second month of the year 1358, when Bassui was thirty-one years old. It was at this time that he started wearing Buddhist robes and began making pilgrimages around the country visiting Zen masters. Bassui went to see Fukuan Shōin of Hōkokuji Temple in Hitachi province, a noted Zen master who had studied in China. Fukuan had a following that numbered about two thousand. Bassui, unimpressed with Fukuan, returned to his hometown and went to see his friend Tokukei. He told Tokukei that he had not got on well with Fukuan and was planning to practice by himself in some isolated mountain retreat. Tokukei, having spent over twenty years practicing austerities in seclusion, had developed a great deal of pride in his practice. This pride became the cause of much of his pain and suffering. He warned Bassui of the dangers of this kind of seclusion before fully understanding "the great matter" or receiving the transmission from a true teacher.⁴ Though Bassui had received verification from Kōshō he gave up the idea of secluding himself in the mountains in accord with his friend's advice and instead spent that year in a summer and winter training sesshin with Tokukei. Tokukei told Bassui of a certain Kohō Kakumyō of Unjuji Temple in Izumo, who was considered a truly great teacher. Bassui soon set out for Unjuji. Meeting with Kohō Kakumyō (1271–1361) was a Dharma heir to the national teacher Hattō (Shinchi Kakushin, 1227–1298), who brought the Dharma transmitted through Mumon Ekai, the compiler of the famous Zen classic collection of kōshō, the Mumonkan, back to Japan. Shinchi had studied esoteric Buddhism of the Shingon sect on Mount Kōya, and then studied Zen under Dōgen (1200–1253), founder of the Japanese Sōtō sect, and Enni Ben'en (1202–1280) before going to China. His disciple Kohō also studied for a while in China with the great Chinese Zen master Chōmei Myōshin. Kohō who received the bodhisattva precepts from Keizan Jōshin—the fourth ancestor in the Japanese Sōtō line, was a strict teacher who greatly valued the precepts. He did not confirm Bassui's understanding right away, however, but asked him to stay awhile at Unjuji Temple. Bassui stayed on, but as was his custom he declined to reside on the temple grounds. He lived in a nearby hut and visited the master daily. One day during their meeting Kohō asked Bassui why Jōshin responded to the kōshō "Does a dog have Buddha-nature?" with the one word mu ("no"). Bassui answered with the verse: Mountains, rivers, and the great earth, Grass, trees, and the forests, All are mu. When Kohō reprimanded him for responding with his rational mind, Bassui felt as though the foundation of his body and mind fell off like the bottom falling off a barrel. He expressed his experience in this poem: Six windows naturally open, a cold lone flower, Unjuji strikes the rubbish from my eyes, Crushes the gem in my hand right before me, So be it, this gold has become hard iron. Bassui's profound awakening pointed out to him how narrow his previous view of emptiness was. Kohō verified his understanding and gave him the name Bassui, meaning far above average. Bassui was thirty-two years old. After only two months at Unjuji Temple, Bassui once again took to the road seeking out Zen masters to engage in Dharma talk. He was asked to stay on to receive the bodhisattva precepts, which Kohō had received from Keizan Jōshin—Bassui, having little fondness for the ceremony connected with temples, decided to move on. His desire to seclude himself in a mountain retreat in order to deepen his understanding remained alive. Bassui left Unjuji Temple and called upon a well-known Zen master named Dōgen from Inaba. Unimpressed with

D × en, Bassui returned to his friend Tokukei. He told Tokukei of his stay with Koh Ɖ and described Koh Ɖ's Zen to him. Tokukei, happy for his friend, told him of his own regrets at not having met such a teacher in his youth. He said that being an old man he had lost the chance of ever meeting someone like Koh Ɖ—@ was around this time that Bassui built his first hermitage in Nanasawa in his home province, Sagami. Tokukei came to visit him there, and this time he seemed pleased with Bassui's decision to retire to a hermitage to continue his practice. He seemed to be telling Bassui that since he now had met both requirements—having clarified the Way and having received verification from a true teacher—he was ready to undertake this kind of practice. Bassui had a dream that his old teacher, Koh Ɖ was near death. He went to visit Koh Ɖ at Daiy Ɖ the temple he had founded and where he was now residing. After paying his respects to Koh Ɖ and seeing his poor condition, Bassui wanted to stay on with him. He left, however, for reasons uncertain but perhaps related to strained relations with some long-standing disciples of the teacher. The older disciples may have resented Bassui's decision to live off the temple grounds when he first studied under Koh Ɖ. Some were perhaps jealous that Bassui had received the transmission from Koh Ɖ after such a short stay with him. All this resentment may have been compounded by the fact that Bassui did not mix with the other monks and refused to take part in the formal temple activities during his short stay at Unjuji. Koh Ɖ died in 1361 in his ninety-first year. Bassui himself was then thirty-five. Meetings with Other Zen Masters That same year, Bassui moved to a hermitage in the province of Ki. On the way he stopped off at Eigenji Temple in the province of G Ɖ to meet Jakushitsu Genk Ɖ. Jakushitsu, a well-known Zen master, had been to China and had also studied with Ch Ɖ. My Ɖ. Bassui was attracted to the elegant simplicity of Jakushitsu's Zen. They talked about the meaning of monastic life and of Bassui's practice before his formal ordination. Bassui spoke to the monks at Eigenji. He told them that the meaning of monkhood was not to recite sutras but rather to put their lives in order. Bassui always seemed to warn against the dangers of excessive formalization so prevalent in the great religious institutions of the time. In his own life he preferred small hermitages to large monasteries. In his later years when he lived at his temple, K Ɖ. V Ɖ at Enzan, he refused invitations to take charge of Daiy Ɖ Temple and Unjuji Temple, the two large monasteries connected with his teacher Koh Ɖ. gFW leaving Jakushitsu, Bassui returned to the province of Ki to a retreat on Mount Sudayama. A learned monk by the name of Chikugan Teiz ×7RÀ who had studied for a long time under Koh Ɖ lived on a nearby mountain. Chikugan and Bassui had long talks. When Bassui had a problem understanding something in the Blue Cliff Record or the Record of Lin-chi, he would discuss it with Chikugan. Chikugan is recorded to have said that he never met anyone who studied the Way as did Bassui; indeed, he said, Bassui had left him far behind. The following year Bassui went to visit the renowned Zen master of the S ×AM sect, Gasan J ×6VƉ. Ɖ at Eik Ɖ Temple. Bassui was very critical of the Rinzai practice of studying k Ɖ ç0, perhaps because they were becoming more and more formalized, hence losing their original spirit. He seems to have been attracted to the S ×AM sect for its stress on being attentive to all one's everyday activities. After observing the monks at Eik Ɖ Temple, where Gasan was in charge, Bassui developed reservations about the monks there with their tendency toward idealization. He did, however, respect the master and stayed to study with him. Gasan approved of Bassui's understanding, but Bassui, in his usual fashion, refused to stay on to receive the transmission of Gasan's line. From Hermitage to Hermitage Bassui spent the next seventeen years moving around the country living in many hermitages. Though he never stayed more than three years in any one place, a following of devotees began to grow around him. When the numbers got too great, he even went so far as to leave a hermitage secretly and relocate somewhere else. It was not until his final years at his hermitage, the K Ɖ. V Ɖ that he seemed ready to accept

disciples in large numbers. **K Ōv ·V ã Bassui's Final Years** In 1378, Bassui moved to a hermitage on Mount Takemori in the province of Kai. The number of disciples kept increasing; indeed, the records show that eight hundred devotees gathered there. Because of the steep mountain path and the strong winds, Bassui was encouraged to move to the hermitage in Enzan. This was the famous hermitage, the **K Ōv ·V à** where Bassui was to remain for the rest of his days. The year was 1380. At this point, it is clear that Bassui was ready to accept the role of teacher of a large institution. Though he refused the abbotship of two large monasteries and kept the final character an at the end of **K Ōv ·V à** (referring to it as a hermitage rather than a monastery), he accepted all who came to study with him. The number grew to over a thousand monks and lay devotees. It was at **K Ōv ·V à** that the **Wadeigassui** was recorded. It was published in 1386—a year before Bassui's death—not at Bassui's request but with his permission. In his final years he developed great faith in the bodhisattva Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion (Avalokiteśvara in Sanskrit). The name Kannon is the shortened form of Kanzeon, meaning the one who hears the cry of ordinary people and immediately saves them. In the **Wadeigassui**, Bassui referred to Kannon as described in the **ġkramgama Sutra**: "He was a person who for every sound he heard contemplated the mind of the hearer, realizing his own nature." This is clearly the essence of Bassui's teaching—hence his reverence for this bodhisattva. Bassui had a shrine to Kannon built in the northern part of the **K Ōv ·V à** temple grounds and asked to be buried there. In 1387, on the twentieth day of the second month, Bassui sat erect in zazen posture, turned to his disciples, and said: "Look directly! What is this? Look in this manner and you won't be fooled." He repeated this injunction in a loud voice and died. He was sixty-one years old. In accord with his request, he was buried under the shrine of the bodhisattva Kannon.

BASSUI'S ZEN Bassui received verification of his enlightenment from **Koh Œ Kakumy ŌÀ** and in the formal sense, his Dharma lineage is traced to **Koh Ū**'s line. He makes no mention of this connection—or any other for that matter—in either the **Wadeigassui** or any of the letters to his disciples. It is important, however, to look into his biography and the records of his meetings with his teachers to grasp his Zen teaching. Many of the Rinzai teachers Bassui visited, including **Koh ŌÀ** had some connection with the Chinese Zen master **Ch ũ·M My Ō†ōà** who lived at a hermitage, the **Genj ũ àÀ** in Tenmokuzan. The Japanese followers of this **Genj ũ** lineage favored **Ch ũ·M**'s reclusiveness and stressed his blend of Pure Land teaching and Zen. They dissociated themselves from the government supported **Gozan** monasteries, preferring to live in small mountain hermitages. They were known for their austere lives and strong emphasis on zazen. Their influence on Bassui was evident from his strong attraction to practicing in quiet mountain retreats rather than large monasteries. He showed a liking for the elegant simplicity of the Zen master **Jakushitsu**, who had studied for a time with **Ch ũ·M** at **Genj ũ àà& 77V**. He deepened his understanding through his contact with the great **S ūAM** Zen master **Gasán J ū6Vũ' à** Bassui's teacher **Koh Œ** studied with **Gasán's** teacher **Keizan J Ōũ-àÀ** who was credited with spreading **D ŌvVé s** teaching throughout Japan. Since **Koh Ū**'s teacher **Shinchi** studied for some time with **D ŌvVàÀ** we see **D ŌvVé s** influence through three generations of Bassui's lineage. Like many of the ancient Chinese Zen masters, Bassui sought out teachers without regard to lineage—his only criterion was that the teacher must help him deepen his understanding of Zen. He was critical of many of the students at the temples he visited. He had a great respect for the spirit of **Gasán's** teaching in which **D ŌvVé s** stress on attention and care for every detail in one's life was evident. Under **Gasán**, the strict monastery regulations modeled after those of the great Zen monasteries in China were fully developed. Though Bassui had respect for the spirit from which these regulations grew, he seemed critical of the way the monks at **Gasán's** temple reduced them to dogmatic principles. Bassui was also very critical of another type of monk who

was perhaps not an uncommon sight at some of the temples he visited. This was one who, disregarding the correct behavior befitting a monk, acted in an eccentric manner, thinking he was behaving in accord with the spirit of the ancient masters. He might get drunk, act rudely, break the precepts, and think that his unconventional behavior was proof of his freedom from the shackles created by formal practice. Many of these monks may have developed some of their ideas from reading the stories of the ancient masters whose unconventional behavior was for the purpose of teaching others too attached to the conventions of the time. It was probably his contact with these monks that made Bassui so cautious in his approach to kōan training. He warned his disciples about studying the sayings of the old masters before seeing into their own nature. He did, however, say that it was necessary to understand these kōan once the student did see into his own nature. “That’s why if beginning practitioners were first to look directly into their inherent nature, they would be able to see into all kōan naturally. You should know that even though you clearly understand your own mind, if you can’t penetrate the wat D (kōan of the ancients, you still haven’t realized enlightenment” (Wadeigassui). To guard against blatant disregard for the monastic regulations, Bassui left thirty-three rules of behavior for the monks at Kōvō as part of his dying instructions. The first of these rules forbids the drinking of alcohol at Kōvō. It reads as follows: “Not a drop of alcohol is to be brought into this temple. Even though it may be said to be for medicinal purposes, no alcohol of any kind should be consumed. Monks from other temples should not drink any alcohol as long as they stay at this temple.” Bassui was quite firm in his condemnation of the drinking of alcohol. In the Wadeigassui, in response to a question about the importance of keeping the precepts, he says: “The drinking of alcohol, of all broken precepts, is the most upsetting to the serenity of the mind.” Then he goes on to quote from the Bonmō Sutra (Sutra of the Brahma’s Net): “One who hands another a glass of alcohol, making him drink it, will be born without hands in his next five hundred births. How much more so will one who drinks on his own?” Cautioning against thinking of the precepts as mere warnings against inappropriate outward behavior, he continues: “The true meaning of the precepts is that one should refrain not only from drinking alcohol but also from getting drunk on nirvana.” Although he found this deeper meaning in all the precepts, he was strict about keeping these precepts outwardly, too. With this restriction against alcohol, Bassui went so far as to have a shrine built at Kōvō with a deity called Basshushin: the God of Retribution for Drinking Alcohol. Though Bassui says he does not use expedient means but rather teaches people to look into their own nature, teaching both layman and monk alike, he does seem to allow practices that are designed for people whose understanding of the Way is still quite undeveloped. This is consistent with his vow to teach people in accord with their capacity. One such practice was the copying of sutras. In the Wadeigassui he defends this practice by saying that it is a way of emptying the mind. He goes even further when he tells his disciples that if they were to transfer this practice to the deceased through memorial services, it would also bring about, for the deceased, the power of seeing into his own nature. In parts of the Wadeigassui, we find Bassui using stories based on myths and superstitions that were prevalent in medieval Japan. His object, however, seems to have been to get his listeners to live in accord with the Dharma. The major part of the text, on the other hand, is very consistent and even contemporary in its message. According to Bassui, all the teachings can be reduced to a single precept: Seeing into one’s original nature is Buddhahood. It is clear now, after looking into Bassui’s life and practice, that this approach—focusing on the one who is listening to the Dharma right now—came from Bassui’s own experience. His intense questioning started, according to his biographer, at age seven and remained the center of his practice throughout his life. He found partial answers to his

questions, but they only led him to deeper questioning. Certainly, this practice was not originated by Bassui. He himself points to other Buddhist sources—the ĩkramgama Sutra and the Record of Lin-chi—as examples of texts that formulate this practice of listening to the listener. And indeed, examples of this teaching are not confined to the Buddhist tradition. Bassui’s strength was his ability to return always to this fundamental question. Bassui, at seven years old, wondered who it was that ate the offerings at his father’s memorial service. This reflection led him twenty years later to the question: “Who is the master of talking, walking, and eating?” Still thirty years later, as an enlightened Zen master of K Ōv ·V âÀ his final advice to his disciples was: “Look directly! What is this? Look in this manner and you won’t be fooled.” He gives no particular answer—and indeed he never did in any of the records of his talks. He is asking us to question so completely that the inquiry frees us from any particular answer, allowing us to stay with the question, and hence to be with ourselves each moment.

COMMENTS ON THE TEXT

The three texts translated here, the complete Enzanwadeigassui-sh ° and parts of the Kana h Ōvð (Dharma Talks in Japanese) and the Kambun h Ōvð (Dharma Talks in Chinese), are our main sources of the teaching of Bassui. Together they give us a pretty comprehensive picture of this unique Zen teacher. Rejecting the Buddhist establishment of his time and criticizing the Zen of both the Rinzai and S ×AM schools, he developed an approach that was entirely his own. He shunned the methods of those two main schools of Zen during his lifetime, but his own teaching penetrates to the core of both Rinzai and S ×AM Zen. In the opening talk in the Wadeigassui (Bassui’s Zuimonki), he responds to a laymen’s question about the relevance of the phrase attributed to the first patriarch, Bodhidharma: “A transmission outside the scriptures and not through words.” First, in dharma combat fashion, he shocks the student out of his mechanical mode. Bringing this student into the present moment, he continues to delineate what the phrase, “transmission outside the scriptures and not through words” means. Here is Bassui at his best; his words flow like lyrical poetry. He is poetic, but he is also concise. As with his opening shock therapy, he is turning the student back to his own resources. The bird flying, the hare running, the sun rising, the moon sinking, the wind blowing, the clouds moving, all things which shift and change are due to the spinning of the right dharma wheel of their own original nature. They depend neither on the teachings of others nor on the power of words. This act of taking statements that students make as well as phrases from traditional texts and elegantly recasting them into essentialist Zen terms that would resonate with most modern religious minds is, more than anything else, characteristic of Bassui’s style of teaching. Though Bassui uses a kind of verbal acrobatics in order to bring his point home, he makes a clear distinction between living and dead words. This distinction goes back to the record of Tung-shan (? – 990), disciple of the great master Yun-mên. In volume 23 of the Transmission of the Lamp, Tung-shan defined two kinds of words: If there is any rational intention manifested in words, then they are dead words; if there is no rational intention manifested in words, then they are living words.⁸ In the Wadeigassui, Bassui defines living words as those words that turn the student back to the self. In a dialog in part III, in talking about the wato, or key line of a k Ō âÀ Bassui quotes Hyakuj Ō “All words and sayings gently turn, returning to the self.” And then Bassui goes on to say: If you truly perfect enlightenment, realizing in this manner, not only will the rare words and wonderful phrases of Buddhas and patriarchs become the self, but there will be nothing in all creation that, after all, is not the self. This characteristically Zen way of turning students back to their own resources causes frustration in many students as they look for something to do. Though this impasse may not be negative in terms of spiritual advancement, the inclusion in this book of Bassui’s Kana h Ōvð helps us deal with this frustration. In the opening “Sermon” in this text, Bassui clearly delineates in practical terms how

we can practice in order to understand the mind he is constantly pointing to. "Sleeping and waking, standing and sitting," he tells us, "profoundly ask yourself, 'What is my own mind?' with an intense yearning to resolve the question." In the *Kana h Övð*, he writes to disciples from all walks of life: laypeople and clergy, men and woman, lords and ordinary people. He instructs them on how to practice zazen and how to understand the mind that is beyond rational thinking. When, in the *Kana h Övð*, Bassui refers to "constantly praying to Buddhas," and "being under the watchful but friendly eye of heavenly beings," we get a hint of a Bassui that does not always resonate with the modern Zen student. Here we are transported to a world of medieval Japan where spirits and heavenly beings float around watching over us. Though apparently contradictory, Bassui seems to have little difficulty conjuring up devils and hells in an attempt to cajole his students into right practice. His reference to the *S Övð Sutra* from part II of the *Wadeigassui*— in which a monk *S Övð*, on a journey, visits what look like temples and monastery bathhouses to find monks who acted in contradiction to the Dharma being tortured in various horrifying manners—is particularly disturbing to one attracted to Buddhism for its rational nonjudgmental philosophy. It certainly disturbed me when I came across it. It also made me wonder what the minds of the people he was addressing were like. In the latter part of the fourteenth century, Japan was in the throws of a civil war. There was, at the time Bassui was in charge of *K Öv ·V à* at the end of his life, a ruling family, the Ashikaga, however in most of the provinces around the country, anarchy ruled. Temples, as refuges for the disenfranchised, reflected the mood of the country. In the *Wadeigassui* Bassui describes some of these students and how they misunderstand and misuse the Dharma. Then there are the rebels. Calling themselves liberated, they throw away their three types of robes and their begging bowls. They don't wear monk's robes; they put on courtly hats, wear skins of dogs, cats, rabbits and deer. They sing and dance and criticize the Right Law. They pass through this world deceiving laymen and women. If someone were to rebuke them for this behavior, they would refer to the homeless sages like Hotei, Kanzan, and Jittoku...saying they are like these monks, while they never amend their erroneous ways in the least. (part III) In chaotic times like these, all kinds of characters were found in and out of monasteries. Their presence seems to have made Bassui, a rebel in his own right, a stickler for keeping the precepts. To Bassui, using the Dharma as an excuse to ignore right behavior was an indication of a misunderstanding of religious practice. His strong injunctions against the use of liquor, even for medicinal purposes, shows what a problem liquor was in temples during his time. Bassui's skepticism of *k Ö à* practice—though he clearly did not reject *k Ö ç9v Ç6ð* seems to have been derived from how they were misused during this period in Zen's history. His objection was to monks who study *k Ö ç0*, have an apparent grasp of their meanings, but haven't really had the proper foundation in zazen, hence: ...ignore the laws of cause and effect, and treat the alms they receive as unimportant. Eating the five spicy foods and drinking liquor, they become wild, abuse the Buddhas and the patriarchs, condemn good teachers everywhere, and criticize things of the past as well as the present...they love to talk Zen and wish only to be victorious in Zen combat. When Bassui asks, "Who is the master?" as he did of himself during his own training, and demands that his students pursue this enquiry to its core, not stopping even at realization, but rather, "...throwing out [realization], returning to the one who realizes..." (*Kana h Övð'À* Bassui is pointing to the nature of the Self, which can be understood when one truly learns the nature of "he" who makes decisions, he who moves the arms and legs.... In the words of Rinzai, "...you must recognize the one who manipulates these reflections. He is the primal source of all the Buddhas and every place is home to which the follower of the Way returns."⁹ In bringing people back to the "master who hears, sees..." Bassui, like Rinzai, is steering students away from the

feeling, “I know.” I believe Bassui would have been in complete agreement with Keizan’s description of Dōshū’s conversation with Dōshū’s master Rujing in the Transmission of Light: Therefore it has been said, “When you see, there is not a single thing.” Having reached this point, Dōshū expressed it by saying he had shed body and mind. Rujing then acknowledged him saying, “Body and mind shed, shed body and mind.” And finally, “Shedding is shed.” Once having reached this state, one will be like a bottomless basket. Like a perforated cup—no matter how much you put into it, it is never filled. Reaching this is called “the bottom falling out of the bucket.”¹⁰ Compare this with Bassui in Kana hōvō, In the end, understanding through reason will completely disappear and you will forget your own body. Then your previous ideas will cease and the depth of your questioning mind will be sufficient. Your realization will be complete as when the bottom falls out from a barrel and not a drop of water remains. Bassui, like Dōshū before him, was critical of the kind of kōan training that gave the student a false sense of “having arrived.” “You must penetrate your kōan to the very core,” he told the Abbess of Shinryūji, adding, “The foundation of every kōan is one’s own mind” (Kana hōvō: “But this core for Bassui, is a barrel that won’t hold even a drop of water. That is the “original nature” he stresses. Something fluid, something that holds onto nothing, something that “knows it doesn’t know.” This fluidity that comes from deep penetration into the meaning of Dharma is what allowed Bassui to deal with so many varied situations in such a creative fashion. He was a strict disciplinarian as seen in his admonitions in Kana hōvō not to let down your guard for a moment during practice—referring to attaining a certain degree of understanding through the practice of zazen: However, if you think this degree of realization is true enlightenment in which you no longer doubt your understanding of the true nature of reality, you will be making a great mistake. It will be like giving up hope of finding gold because you discover copper. He responded to questions about Pure Land Buddhist Sutras with clarity and ingenuity, showing how those teachings like all the Buddhist teachings, in the end, point to the One Mind. Bassui’s longer sermons when treating Pure Land Buddhist subjects contrast with his pithy dharma-combat-like treatment of students’ questions about traditional Zen sayings. When a student infers that monks’ robes might protect a person who commits “small sins,” Bassui’s response is a surprising display of shock therapy—invoking images of heretics and demons. Though his warning of karmic retribution seems to contradict his usual nondual “pointing to the One Mind,” his overriding purpose, as stated by Bassui in his letter to a monk in Shobo Hermitage, is to save all ordinary people before seeking truth for his own sake. Since we are not told who his audience is, we must assume he speaks differently to different people. So for us, living in this present century, his statement in the Wadeigassui, “Dharma is inward realization. Non-dharma consists of formal aspects such as name and form, writings and sayings, and so forth. Whether the attachment is to the inner or outer, it always refers to the ‘me,’” clearly resonates, while we are taken aback when he refers to violators of the precepts falling into the deepest hells. But we can’t remove any of his responses from their cultural or social underpinnings. Nor can we remove Bassui, himself, from this medieval Japanese environment in which he was raised. What we can do, as a result of the information from these three texts, is come up with an educated picture of a Zen rebel who refused to be pigeonholed. He questioned who he was from his boyhood. The question led him deeper and deeper until he realized that “all views are delusion.” Living alone in hermitages through most of his adult life, he developed a single-minded practice that depended neither on buddhas nor bodhisattvas. In keeping with his vow to save ordinary people, he spent the latter part of his life pointing to a zazen practice of looking into one’s true nature. Whether he talked with Pure Land Buddhists who interpreted the sutras literally or Zen practitioners who thought they were above the simple teachings of the

scriptures, he pointed to one truth that was crystal clear to him: Realize that all form is apparition and stop calculating; kill the Buddha when he appears in your mind and ordinary people when they appear in your mind; destroy the world when it appears and the void when it appears... Do you wish to penetrate directly and be free? When I am talking like this, many people are listening. Quickly! Look at the one who is listening to this talk. Who is he who is listening right now?" (Wadeigassui, part III) What is the significance of Bassui to the world of contemporary Zen? Bassui, like Dōshin and the Chinese Rinzai master Ta-hui before him, critics of the Zen of their day, was trying to make Zen relevant to his world. To make Zen relevant is to give it life. Though Dōshin was a severe critic of Ta-hui's teaching, both men found fault with the mechanical way *kōan* were used. Ta-hui was said to have burned the woodblocks of the *Hekiganroku*, a *kōan* collection that his teacher Yuan-wu compiled, to show his discontent with the excessive use of *kōan*. As with most religious practices, *kōan* lost their true meaning when they became agents of political and social purposes within institutions. Ta-hui saw *kōan* as a way to transcend ordinary consciousness by reaching an impasse, "a great doubt" staying with this doubt until a breakthrough to a world where rational thinking doesn't penetrate. Dōshin, on the other hand, used language in a creative and original way to understand the true meaning of *kōan*, a way beyond our normal boundaries of language.¹¹ Though in the *Wadeigassui*, and the *Kana hō* we find instances of Bassui dealing with these paradoxical sayings of the ancestors in ways similar to Dōshin sometimes and similar to Ta-hui at other times, his most characteristic response is that all these sayings point to one's original nature. In answer to a question about which is preferable, looking in the *wat* or looking into one's own nature, he responds: Originally these meaningful expressions were all the same. Since one thousand or ten thousand phrases simply become the one phrase of one's own nature, one's own nature is the foundation of the *wat*. Reach the roots and there is no lamenting the branches. (Wadeigassui, part III) The importance of Bassui's insistence on understanding one's own nature before trying to understand the phrases of the ancients is most relevant to students today. This practice does not carry with it any cultural trappings that are a big component of the traditional *kōan*. *Kōan*, taken from episodes from the lives of the ancient masters pointing to the nature of ultimate reality, became formalized sayings that justified lineage and transmission. They became a kind of code that helped those in charge of institutions maintain their authority during Bassui's time. Bassui's attempt to bring back some life to this Zen practice was short lived if we are to judge it by the practice of *kōan* Zen in both Rinzai and Sōtō schools in the centuries that followed. Like Dōshin and his attempt to give life to this unique tradition, Bassui was defeated by the needs of large institutions in an authoritarian society. If we see his work from the point of view of the record he left behind, writings that influenced the Zen master Hakuin and others as they too hundreds of years after him tried to revive Zen during another period of its decline, and if we see this record as a guide to us in developing a practice of vital Zen today, his contribution is quite significant. Many Zen groups in the West, including those started by teachers from authoritarian societies, have developed new forms that speak to problems of hierarchy, gender inequality, family practice, and social responsibility. They are trying to create a space where people who are serious about Zen meditation can practice without being required to be formally initiated into any sect or school. This seems to be the direction of American Zen. Much of what Bassui says in these texts suits this kind of practice. He asks his students to rely on themselves. He tells them to turn to the one who is listening, for he or she is the master. That is not the kind of advice that requires a Buddhist community for its implementation. Nor does it seem any less relevant in the present century than it did in the fourteenth when he was giving that talk. But we can't forget that Bassui is a Buddhist monk and

is talking in the fourteenth century. As we try to understand Bassui's relevance to our world today, we need to look at a broader question: What is the relevance of the ancient teachers to contemporary Zen? That they are relevant is clear. But when we take their teachings whole, without sifting out what doesn't make sense in a new context, we usually get into trouble. Much of what Bassui says does make sense. Since he was not involved in the politics of religion to the degree that other Zen teachers were, and since his lineage never had significant power and hence didn't have to sink to the need to distort or water down his teachings in a way that sometimes happened with Dōgen we have a pretty good sense of his intention. We will inevitably see him through our own cultural glasses, but we can also see something that transcends culture. There is something universal in this unique teaching that has kept it alive until today.

PART I OUTSIDE THE SCRIPTURES AND NOT THROUGH WORDS

LAYMAN SAID: "Though Zen is said to be transmitted outside the scriptures and not through words, there are many more incidents of monks questioning teachers and inquiring of the Way than in the teaching sects."¹ How can Zen be said to be outside the scriptures? And can reading the records of the old masters and seeing how they dealt with kōan ever be considered outside the realm of words? What is the true meaning of the statement, 'Outside the scriptures, and not through words'?"

The master [Bassui] called to him at once: "Layman!" He responded immediately: "Yes?" The master said: "From which teachings did that yes come?" The layman lowered his head and bowed. The master then said: "When you decide to come here, you do so by yourself. When you want to ask a question, you do it by yourself. You do not depend on another nor do you use the teachings of the Buddha. This mind which directs the self is the essence of the transmission outside the scriptures and not through words. It is the pure Zen of the Tathāgata. Clever worldly statements, the written word, reason and duty, discrimination and understanding, cannot reach this Zen. One who looks penetratingly into his true self and does not get ensnared in words, nor stained by the teachings of the buddhas and ancestors, one who goes beyond the singular road which advances toward enlightenment and who does not let cleverness become his downfall, will, for the first time, attain the Way. This does not necessarily mean that one who studies the scriptures and revels in the words of the buddhas and ancestors is a monk of the teaching sects, and one who lacks knowledge of the scriptures is a monk of Zen—which is independent of the teaching and makes no use of words. This doctrine of nondependence on the scriptures is not a way that was first set up by the buddhas and ancestors. From the beginning everyone is complete and perfect. Buddhas and ordinary people alike are originally the Tathāgata. The movement of a newborn baby's legs and arms is also the splendid work of its original nature. The bird flying, the hare running, the sun rising, the moon sinking, the wind blowing, the clouds moving, all things that shift and change are due to the spinning of the right Dharma wheel of their own original nature, depending neither on the teachings of others nor on the power of words. It is from the spinning of my right Dharma wheel that I am now talking like this, and you are all listening likewise through the splendor of your Buddha-nature. The substance of this Buddha-nature is like a great burning fire. When you realize this, gain and loss, right and wrong, will be destroyed as will your own life functions. Life, death, and nirvana will be yesterday's dream. The countless worlds will be like foam on the sea. The teachings of the buddhas and ancestors will be like a drop of snow over a burning red furnace. Then you will not be restrained by Dharma, nor will you rid yourself of Dharma. You will be like a log thrown into a fire, your whole body ablaze, without being aware of the heat. When you have penetrated the truth in this manner and do not stop where practice and enlightenment show their traces, you will be called a Zen practitioner. One who comes into close contact with a Zen master is likened to one entering a burning cave—he dies and is

reborn. The cave of ignorance is burned out, giving rise to the great function that goes beyond ordinary standards. It is as though a burning forge were applied to a dull piece of steel converting it instantly into a sacred sword. This is the most important point for a Zen practitioner who meets a master and inquires about the Dharma.”RINZAI’S ENLIGHTENMENTRINZAI ASKED OBAKU: “What is the unequivocal meaning of the Buddhadharma?” Obaku immediately gave him twenty blows with his staff. Repeating this question three times he received twenty blows each time. Rinzai, skeptical of this treatment, left Obaku and went to Daigu. He asked Daigu: “Having asked Obaku the true meaning of the Buddhadharma on three occasions, I was beaten each time. Am I at fault?”Daigu responded: “This manner of behavior is due to Obaku’s warmhearted kindness. It was done out of tender consideration for you. How can you ask whether or not you were to blame?”Rinzai, upon hearing these words, had a great awakening and said: “Obaku’s Buddhadharma is nothing special.”Daigu, grabbing him by the chest, said: “A moment ago you asked if you were at fault or not, and now you turn around and say the Buddhadharma is nothing special. From what line of teaching did you find this?”Rinzai then struck him three times under the arm with his fist. Daigu, pushing him aside, said: “Your teacher is Obaku. You are not under my charge.”Well, did the behavior of these two old sages, Obaku and Daigu, amount to intellectual resolutions of words and phrases? Through what teachings did Rinzai’s enlightenment come?EJ Æ OF NANGAKU’S ENLIGHTENMENTTHEN THERE WAS THE ZEN MASTER Ej Æ of Nangaku who excelled in learning the scriptures. Before reaching enlightenment he had an interview with the sixth ancestor, En Æ The sixth ancestor asked: “What is it that comes in this manner?” Ej Æ could not answer at that time, but carried his doubt with him for eight years. He then came to a realization and went to see the sixth ancestor again. The sixth ancestor said: “What is it that comes in this manner?” Ej Æ replied: “One word of explanation already misses the mark.” The sixth ancestor said: “This is still a disease of the mind.” Ej Æ took leave again, and once more spent eight years with this doubt. Finally, having experienced a great awakening, he returned for an interview with the sixth ancestor.The master again asked: “What is it that comes in this manner?”Ej Æ replied: “It’s not that there is no realization, but that it doesn’t defile me.”The sixth ancestor immediately accepted this response.

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What people say about this book

Emon, "And, finally, the last word..... If you ever read Bassui from the beginning, as one of your very first Buddhist writings, and then went on to read all those hundreds of other Buddhist works, I think you'd eventually return to Bassui: he just teaches it simply and without the circus and fanfare. If, on the other hand, you happened upon Bassui after having read all those other hundreds of Buddhist works, then I think you just might find your self thinking "why didn't I start with Bassui from the very beginning?" If you had an original samadhi, so many years ago, and now your life is one of searching to re-experience that original "seeing", study Bassui. Especially "Letters to His Disciples". He is nuts-and-bolts Buddhism but without the labeling and the window dressing. Better yet, if it's possible, practice to realize your True Nature first, then bring in Bassui."

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welvis77, "fantastic. an absolute treasure. up there with linchi and dogen."

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Andrew Beaulac, "Purity and clarity in "Mud...". Zen Master Bassui's instruction always cut right to the heart of the great matter: he emphasized deep and clear penetration into one's own true nature. Questioned about many common Buddhist concepts, Bassui brought the listener - and here the reader- back again and again to the inescapable necessity of seeing one's true nature. In this manner, all the dualistic questionings are brought back to the non-dual. Arthur Braverman's translation reflects his expertise and personal history in Zen practice inasmuch as he sensitively unlocks the insights of the teachings in their original language and historical context and brings them forth into English. This and his explanatory notes keep the reader on track for understanding a Zen teacher whom I find much more accessible than Dogen. Plus, it's just a very enjoyable and readable book."

schiff, "Clear as Glass. The Teachings of Zen Master Bassui are sure to instill a profound and shattering recognition in any student of the Way. Again and again this venerable maverick Zen master swings his blow at the very core of Buddhist thinking, while responding to questions and riddles posed by his own followers, as well as by monks visiting his monastery. Most of Master Bassui's teachings are arranged in the usual Q&A form, prevalent in Zen literature, with short, concise and helpful notes by the translator appearing at the end of the book. Although coming to us from a distance of some centuries, the teachings are an enjoyable reading, their message as clear as glass. Put your mind to it and learn from this extraordinary Master!"

kenko, "Yes, but I agree with the preceding reviewers: Yes, Bassui's teaching IS the final teaching and it is expressed very, very clearly. But I can recommend this book only with the reservation, that the reader has done previous studies or has practiced under the guidance of a qualified teacher. Otherwise it will be just another interesting reading in the best case, in the worst case it might send you to a long and painful detour. Why? Because if a teaching is right or not, depends not only on the teacher's correct insight, but also on the student's correct assimilation. Dhamma-teachings which are intirely correct might as well become wrong or even poisonous. So, if one would like to find to the correct understanding of Bassui's teaching, I would recommend to study with a qualified dhamma-teacher (of any tradition; it doesn't really matter) beforehand and/or study the following books in the following order:"The Middle-Way Meditation Instructions of Mipham Rinpoche", "A Song for the King" and "Crystal Clear"; all by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche. After having studied these books go back to Bassui and see for yourself, how his voice reverberates now in you. May all living beings be happy!"

Black_Saga, "Five Stars. Like having water splashed in your sleeping face."

Abraham, "When a book teaches you more than a teacher. I think Zen's main issue with penetrating the west lies in the fact that there are not enough teachers who can help you along the way unlike in eastern countries. The need for an authentic teacher is vital for most who undertake the path of understanding and without someone you can turn to, your practice may (not will, just may) become misguided and full of delusions. It is therefore paramount to have books such as this one to lean on which can substitute a physically present teacher and at least help you not lose sight of the most fundamental points. Zen is a deeply personal practice but the result is always the same and to that end, a book just like a teacher can always help guide you to that result, albeit a book not being able to see at which point in your journey you are at or giving you personalised help tailored to you as an individual. Nevertheless, this book alongside Dogen's Shobogenzo and Yasutani's Three pillars of Zen can do a more than apt job of helping you on your journey and I would strongly recommend anyone to read these books who is serious about their practice and journey, especially if they do not have a teacher they can turn to. Let Bassui's words echo through time and space and illuminate your mind." "Look directly! What is this? Look in this manner and you won't be fooled." - Bassui"

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The book by Arthur Braverman has a rating of 5 out of 4.9. 29 people have provided feedback.

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