

# WILD WAYS



IKKYU



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*A World of Voices*



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## Translator's Introduction

Ikkyu, born as the sun rose on the first day of 1394, was rumored to have been sired by the emperor Gokomatsu. His mother, a member of the influential Fujiwara clan, had been one of Gokomatsu's attendants at court, but she had been slandered by the empress and subsequently ousted from the palace prior to Ikkyu's birth.

Being in such straitened circumstances, Ikkyu's mother was obliged to send him at age five to Ankoku-ji, a Rinzai Zen temple in Kyoto, to be raised by the monks. The precocious little acolyte quickly distinguished himself at the monastery, attaining renown at that early age for both his keen mind and his impish behavior. Ikkyu may have been mischievous, but even as a teenager he was deadly serious about Zen. When Ikkyu was fifteen, he overheard the subabbot boasting about his family background and important connections. "Filled with shame," Ikkyu abandoned Ankoku-ji and went to train under Ken'o, an eccentric old-time master who lived in a shack in the hills.

Ikkyu remained with Ken'o until the master's death, in 1414. Despondent, the troubled Ikkyu contemplated suicide for a time and then sought admission to the community of monks training with Kaso, another no-nonsense Zen master of the old school. The regimen at Kaso's retreat consisted of heavy work, meager food, little sleep, and endless hours of meditation.

Ikkyu's struggle for awakening was long and arduous, but one midsummer night in 1420, as he was meditating in a boat on lovely Lake Biwa, the caw of a crow brought the twenty-six-year-old monk out of his stupor. Ikkyu's enlightenment verse: For twenty years I was in turmoil Seething and angry, but now my time has come! The crow laughs, an arhat emerges from the filth, And in the sunlight a jade beauty sings!

When Kaso presented Ikkyu with an inka, a seal of enlightenment, Ikkyu hurled it to the ground in protest and stomped away. Despite this and other difficulties between master and disciple, Kaso said, "Ikkyu is my true heir, but his ways are wild."

After Kaso died, in 1428, Ikkyu indeed went his own wild way, calling himself a "crazy cloud." He spent much of his life as a vagrant monk, wandering here and there in the environs of Kyoto, Nara, Osaka, and Sakai. Ikkyu mingled with all manner of people, from the highest (he had several meetings with the retired emperor Gokomatsu) to the lowest (he often traveled in the company of beggars). Ikkyu was the darling of merchants, who loved his antic style, yet at the same time he was a defender of the poor against greedy landlords. On occasion Ikkyu played Robin Hood—taking money set aside for a rich man's funeral and spending it on the homeless, for example.

Once Ikkyu, clad in his customary shabby robe and tattered hat, went to beg at the door of a wealthy family's home. He was roughly ordered around to the back of the estate and given scraps. The following day, Ikkyu appeared at a vegetarian feast sponsored by the family, but this time Ikkyu was decked out in the brocade robes of an abbot. When the large tray of food was placed before him, Ikkyu removed his stiff robe and arranged it in front of the tray. "What are you doing?" the startled host asked. "The food belongs to the robe, not to me," Ikkyu replied as he got up to leave.

Ikkyu interspersed his travels with lengthy retreats deep in the mountains, where he grew vegetables and meditated. He counted many artists among his wide circle of acquaintances, and Ikkyu's own dynamic art had a profound impact on the development of poetry, painting, calligraphy, the tea ceremony, flower arranging, and Noh drama in Japan. Periodically, Ikkyu was summoned to serve as chief priest of a temple, only to quickly grow disgusted with the hypocrisy of fame-and-fortune Zen:

Who among Rinzai's descendants really transmits his Zen?

It is concealed in this Blind Donkey.

Straw sandals, a bamboo staff, an unfettered life—

You can have your fancy chairs, meditation platforms, and fame-and-fortune Zen.

Throughout his life, Ikkyu wanted his Zen to be raw, direct, and authentic. For Ikkyu, part of being authentic was to be totally up front about sex: "If one is thirsty, he dreams of water; if one is cold, he will dream of a thick robe. It is my nature to dream of the pleasures of the bedchamber!" After initial experiences with homosexual love in the monastery, Ikkyu turned to women as a constant source of inspiration and unbridled joy. There were also difficult periods of deprivation and intense sorrow in Ikkyu's love life, which he accepted as being equally valid Zen experiences.

Following eight decades of wild ways, in 1474 Ikkyu was asked to become head abbot of Daitoku-ji, perhaps the most important Zen temple in the cultural history of Japan. Daitoku-ji had been destroyed in the senseless Onin War, and in seven years Ikkyu succeeded in having it completely rebuilt. The effort exhausted him, however, and Ikkyu passed away while seated in the lotus posture in 1481, at age eighty-seven. Not long before his death he told his disciples: After I'm gone, some of you will seclude yourselves in the forests and mountains to meditate, while others may drink rice wine and enjoy the company of women. Both kinds of Zen are fine, but if some become professional clerics, babbling about "Zen as the Way," they are my enemies.\*

Ikkyu began composing poetry in his early teens, and more than a thousand poems are contained in the *Crazy Cloud Anthology* compiled by his disciples. Just as in everything else, Ikkyu totally ignored the rules of composition, and his poems come in all styles and forms. Much of his verse rants against the pervasive hypocrisy of the Buddhist establishment and decries the corruption of the imperial court and its officials. Such criticism was entirely justified, but even Ikkyu himself felt that he often went too far—"How many have I slain with my barbed words?" He ranted against himself as well, bemoaning his lack of self-control and his inordinate love of poetry. In addition to poems on standard religious subjects, Ikkyu composed a number of poems on koan phrases (usually his poems are more difficult to understand than the koans themselves). Ikkyu wrote several prose poems on Buddhist themes, the best being "Skeletons," which is included at the end of this collection.

As a poet, Ikkyu was at his finest when writing about what he loved most: the unfettered Zen life and the joys of sexual intimacy. The selection presented here in *Wild Ways* consists of verses centering around those two themes. It may seem ironic that a Buddhist monk is best remembered for his love songs, but we also have the example of the sixth Dalai Lama, who once chanted: If the bar-girl does not falter, The beer will flow on and on. This maiden is my refuge And this place my haven.

# Zen Poems

## One Short Pause

One short pause between  
The leaky road here and  
The never-leaking Way there:  
If it rains, let it rain!  
If it storms, let it storm!

A Crazy Cloud, out in the open,  
Blown about madly, as wild as they come!  
Who knows where this cloud will go, where the wind will still?  
The sun rises from the eastern sea, and shines over the land.

Forests and fields, rocks and weeds - my true companions.  
The wild ways of the Crazy Cloud will never change.  
People think I'm mad but I don't care:  
If I'm a demon here on earth, there is no need to fear the hereafter.

Every day, priests minutely examine the Dharma  
And endlessly chant complicated sutras.  
Before doing that, though, they should learn  
How to read the love letters sent by the wind and rain, the snow and moon.

Monks these days study hard in order to turn  
A fine phrase and win fame as talented poets.  
At Crazy Cloud's hut there is no such talent, but he serves up the taste of truth  
As he boils rice in a wobbly old cauldron.

Bliss and sorrow, love and hate, light and shadow, hot and cold, joy and anger, self and other.  
The enjoyment of poetic beauty may well lead to hell.  
But look what we find strewn all along our Path:  
Plum blossoms and peach flowers!

Ten days in this temple and my mind is reeling!  
Between my legs the red thread stretches and stretches.  
If you come some other day and ask for me,  
Better look in a fish stall, a sake shop, or a brothel.

## Returning to the City from the Mountains

Crazy Cloud blown by who knows what wild wind.  
In the mountains by day, in the city by night.  
I shout katsu and wield the staff when I see fit,  
Even Rinzai and Tokusan would be no match for me.

## I Hate Incense

A master's handiwork cannot be measured  
But still priests wag their tongues explaining the "Way" and babbling about "Zen."  
This old monk has never cared for false piety  
And my nose wrinkles at the dark smell of incense before the Buddha.

Crazy Cloud speaks of Daito's unsurpassed brilliance  
But the clatter of royal carriages about the temple gates drowns him out  
And no one listens to tales of the Patriarch's long years  
Of hunger and homelessness beneath Gojo Bridge.

Monk Ganto practiced Zen while rowing a boat;  
Monk Chin gathered rushleaf to make sandals.  
I always praise the great worth of a single raincoat and straw hat -  
But who is there to appreciate their true elegance?

## Raincoat and Straw Hat

Woodcutters and fishermen know just how to use things.  
What would they do with fancy chairs and meditation platforms?  
In straw sandals and with a bamboo staff, I roam three thousand worlds,  
Dwelling by the water, feasting on the wind, year after year.

## A Fisherman

Studying texts and stiff meditation can make you lose your Original Mind.  
A solitary tune by a fisherman, though, can be an invaluable treasure.  
Dusk rain on the river, the moon peeking in and out of the clouds;  
Elegant beyond words, he chants his songs night after night.

The Dreamy Sound of Bokushitsu's Shakuhachi Awakened Me  
from Deep Sleep One Moonlit Night

A wonderful autumn night, fresh and bright;  
Over the echo of music and drums from a distant village  
The single clear tone of a *shakuhachi* brings a flood of tears –  
Startling me from a deep, melancholy dream.

Exhausted with gay pleasures, I embrace my wife.  
The narrow path of asceticism is not for me;  
My mind runs in the opposite direction.  
It is easy to be glib about Zen - I'll just keep my mouth shut  
And rely on love play all the day long.

A Man's Root

Eight inches strong, it is my favorite thing;  
If I'm alone at night, I embrace it fully—  
A beautiful woman hasn't touched it for ages.  
Within my *fundoshi* there is an entire universe!

A Woman's Sex

It has the original mouth but remains wordless;  
It is surrounded by a magnificent mound of hair.  
Sentient beings can get completely lost in it  
But it is also the birthplace of all the Buddhas of the ten thousand worlds.

Rinzai's disciples never got the Zen message,  
But I, the Blind Donkey, know the truth:  
Love play can make you immortal.  
The autumn breeze of a single night of love is better than a hundred thousand years of  
sterile sitting meditation. . .

Stilted koans and convoluted answers are all monks have,  
Pandering endlessly to officials and rich patrons.  
Good friends of the Dharma, so proud, let me tell you,  
A brothel girl in gold brocade is worth more than any of you.

Emerging from the world's grime, a puritan saint is still nowhere near a Buddha.  
Enter a brothel once and Great Wisdom will explode upon you.  
Manjushri should have let Ananda enjoy himself in the whorehouse –  
Now he will never know the joys of elegant love play.

A sex-loving monk, you object!  
Hot-blooded and passionate, totally aroused.  
Remember, though, that lust can consume all passion,  
Transmuting base metal into pure gold.

The lotus flower  
Is unstained by mud;  
This single dewdrop,  
Just as it is,  
Manifests the real body of truth.

Follow the rule of celibacy blindly and you are no more than an ass;  
Break it and you are only human.  
The spirit of Zen is manifest in ways countless as the sands of the Ganges.  
Every newborn is a fruit of the conjugal bond.  
For how many aeons have secret blossoms been budding and fading?

With a young beauty, sporting in deep love play;  
We sit in the pavilion, a pleasure girl and this Zen monk.  
Enraptured by hugs and kisses,  
I certainly don't feel as if I am burning in hell.

#### In Praise of Fish-Basket Kannon

Crimson cheeks, light-colored hair, full of compassion and love.  
Lost in a dream of love play, I contemplate her beauty.  
Her thousand eyes of great mercy look upon all but see no one beyond redemption.  
This goddess can even be a fisherman's wife by a river or sea, singing of salvation.

*Long ago, there was an old woman who had supported a hermit monk for twenty years. She had a sixteen-year-old girl bring him meals. One day she instructed the girl to embrace the monk and ask, "How do you feel right now?" The young girl did as told, and the monk's response was, "I'm an old withered tree against a frigid cliff on the coldest day of winter." When the girl returned and repeated the monk's words to the old woman, she exclaimed. "For twenty years I've been supporting that base worldling!" The old woman chased the monk out and put the hermitage to the torch.*

The old woman was bighearted enough  
To elevate the pure monk with a girl to wed.  
Tonight if a beauty were to embrace me  
My withered old willow branch would sprout a new shoot!

#### Poem Presented to My Friend Ako at the Hot Spring

It is nice to get a glimpse of a lady bathing—  
You scrubbed your flower face and cleansed your lovely body  
While this old monk sat in the hot water,  
Feeling more blessed than even the emperor of China!

When we parted, it broke my heart;  
Her powdered cheeks were more beautiful than spring flowers.  
My lovely miss is now with another,  
Singing the same love song but to a different tune.

#### Reminiscences

Memories and deep thoughts of love pain my breast;  
Poetry and prose all forgotten, not a word left.  
There is a path to enlightenment but I've lost heart for it.  
Today, I'm still drowning in samsara.

#### The Dharma Master of Love

My life has been devoted to love play;  
I've no regrets about being tangled in red thread from head to foot,  
Nor am I ashamed to have spent my days as a Crazy Cloud –  
But I sure don't like this long, long bitter autumn of no good sex!

For ten straight years, I reveled in pleasure houses.  
Now I'm all alone deep in the dark mountain valley.  
Thirty thousand cloud leagues live between me and the places I love.  
The only sound that reaches my ears is the melancholy wind blowing in the pines.

### Three Poems on Love and Longing

Day and night I cannot keep you out of my thoughts;  
In the darkness, on an empty bed, the longing deepens.  
I dream of us joining hands, exchanging words of love,  
But then the dawn bell shatters my reverie and rends my heart.

Women, lovely flowers that bloom and quickly fade;  
Flowery faces, in full flush, lovely as dreams.  
When flowers burst open they grow heavy with passion  
But once they fall, no one speaks of them again.

Even if I were a god or a Buddha you'd be on my mind.  
I sit beneath the lamp, a skinny monk chanting love songs.  
The fierce autumn wind nearly bowls me over  
And my heart is choked with thick clouds.

### Under the Fragrant Eaves

The bamboo thicket has a new set of sprouts.  
This old monk feels young again,  
My beauty is just thirty-six.  
A fresh breeze blows through the crumbling walls.

### The Stick of Zen

Sexual love can be so painful when it is deep,  
Making you forget even the best prose and poetry.  
Yet now I experience a heretofore unknown natural joy,  
The delightful sound of the wind soothing my thoughts.

### To Lady Mori

The most beautiful and truest of all women;  
Her songs the fresh, pure melody of love.  
A voice and sweet smile that rends my heart—  
I'm in a spring forest of lovely cherry-apples.

