

renin and po-chi-i : two huts in the east

Record of the Ten Foot Square Hut:

Now that I've reached the age of sixty, when life fades as quickly as dew, I've put together a lodging for my final days. I'm like a traveler who prepares shelter for one night, or an aging silkworm spinning its cocoon. The size is not even one hundredth that of the house where I lived in middle age. You might say that, as my years have grown in number, my houses have gotten smaller and smaller.

My present place is quite unlike any ordinary dwelling. It measures only ten feet square and less than seven feet in height. Since I never thought of it as a permanent residence, I did not divine to see whether the site was auspicious or not. It has a dirt foundation, a simple roof of thatch, and the joints are held together with metal fastenings. This is so that, if I decide I don't like the spot, I can easily move it. It would be no trouble at all to take it apart and put it together again. Two carts would hold it all, with no other expense than the labor to pull the carts.

Since I came here to hide my traces in the depth of Mount Hino, on the east side of my hut I have extended the eaves out three feet so as to provide a place for firewood and cooking. On the south I constructed a bamboo verandah, with a shelf for vases and other Buddhist articles at the western end. The north side I blocked off with a partition, and adorned it with an image of Amida, the bodhisattva Fugen by his side; a copy of *The Lotus Sutra* is placed in front of them. Along the east edge of the room I've spread soft fern fronds to make a place to sleep at night. In the southwest corner I put up a hanging shelf of bamboo with three leather-covered boxes on it. These are for my books on Japanese poetry and music and for selections from the Buddhist writings such as the *Ojoyoshu - Essentials of Salvation*. Beside them stand my flute and my lute. The music stand is the collapsible kind, and the lute has a neck that can be

detached. Such is the layout of this little temporary dwelling of mine.

As to my surroundings, south of my hut I have rigged a bamboo pipe that feeds water into a rocky basin I have fashioned. Since there are plenty of forest trees close by, I have no trouble gathering whatever brushwood I need. This part of the mountain is called Toyama or Outer Hill. The trails are buried in creepers, the valleys dense with vegetation. But I have a clear view to the west, which is some aid to my meditations. In spring I look out on trailing boughs of wisteria, shimmering in the west like purple clouds. In summer I hear the cuckoo, and with each call he promises to guide me on the road of death. In autumn the cicada's cry fills my ears, and he seems to be lamenting this empty shell of a world. In winter I watch the snows pile up and melt away again, like the sins and impediments in our lives.

If the night is still, I gaze at the moon in the window, thinking of old friends, or shed tears at the plaintive wail of the monkeys. Fireflies in the clumps of grass might be taken for the distant flares of fishermen on Maki Island, and showers at dawn sound just like tree leaves blowing in a storm. When I hear the cry of the pheasant, I wonder if it is not the voice of my father or mother, and when I see how friendly the deer from the hilltop have become, I realize how far removed I am from the outside world.

When I first came here to live, I in fact expected to stay only a short while, yet now five years have passed. My "temporary dwelling" has become an old home of sorts, the area under the eaves heaped with decaying leaves, the foundation overgrown with moss. This temporary dwelling of mine has remained tranquil and safe from harm.

Small as it is, it provides room enough to sleep at night and to sit in the daytime, all that is needed to accommodate one person. The hermit

crab prefers a little shell because he knows the dimensions of his own body. The fish hawk dwells on the crag-bound shore because he fears to be where people are. And I am the same. Knowing my own size and knowing the ways of the world, I crave nothing, chase about after nothing. I desire only a peaceful spot, and delight in being free from care. I have fashioned a house for myself alone, not for anyone else. Why? Because, the times being what they are and I the person I am, I have no one to be a companion, no servant in my employ.

This threefold world of ours is a creation of the mind. If the mind is not at ease, then the finest horses and elephants, the seven precious substances, all seem worthless, and palaces and pleasure towers hold no allure. But now I find myself loving this lonely dwelling, my one-room hut. I feel ashamed whenever circumstances oblige me to go to the capital and beg for alms. But once back in my mountain, I can only pity those who chase after worldly gain. If people doubt what I say, let them look at the fish and birds. The fish never tire of the water, yet if one is not a fish, one can hardly understand what is in the fish's mind. Birds long only for the forest, but if one is not a bird, one cannot understand why. The same applies to these delights of the quiet life. Without living such a life, how can one comprehend them?

Now my term draws to a close, like a moon nearing the rim of the mountain as it sinks in the sky. Soon I will face the darkness of Sanzu River. What use now in grumbling? The teachings of the Buddha warn us against feelings of attachment. So now it must be wrong for me to love this thatched hut of mine, and my fondness for quiet and solitude must be a block to my salvation. Why have I wasted precious time in the recital of these useless pleasures? In the stillness of dawn I go on pondering these truths.

Written in the second year of the Kenyaku era [1212], around the last day of the third month, by the shramana Ren'in in his hut on Toyama.

Record of the Thatched Hut on Mount Lu

K'uang Lu, so strange, so superb it tops all the mountains in the empire!] I saw it and fell in love with it. Like a traveler on a distant journey who passes by his old home, I felt so drawn to it I couldn't tear myself away. So, on a site facing the peak and flanking the temple I set about building a grass-thatched hut.

By spring of the following year the thatched hut was finished. Three spans, a pair of pillars, two rooms, four windows the dimensions and expenditures were all designed to fit my taste and means. I put a door on the north side to let in cool breezes so as to fend off oppressive heat, made the southern rafters high to admit sunlight in case there should be times of severe cold. The beams were trimmed but left unpainted, the walls plastered but not given a final coat of white. I've used slabs of stone for paving and stairs, sheets of paper to cover the windows; and the bamboo blinds and hemp curtains are of a similar makeshift nature. Inside the hall are four wooden couches, two plain screens, one lacquered cabinet, and some Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist books, two or three of each kind.

And now that I have come to be master of the house, I gaze up at the mountains, bend down to listen to the spring, look around at the trees and bamboo, the clouds and rocks, busy with them every minute from sunup to evening. Let one of them beckon and I follow it in spirit, happy with my surroundings, at peace within. One night here and my body is at rest, two nights and my mind is content, and after three nights I'm in a state of utter calm and forgetfulness. If I asked myself the reason, I might answer like this.

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In front of my house is an area of level ground measuring ten chang square. In the middle is a flat terrace covering half the level ground. South of the terrace is a square pond twice the size of the terrace. The pond is surrounded by various types of bamboo and wildflowers, and in the pond are white lotuses and silvery fish. Continuing south, one comes to a rocky stream, its banks lined with old pines and cedars, some so big that ten men could barely reach around them, some I don't know how many hundred feet in height. Their upper limbs brush the clouds, their lower branches touch the water; they stick up like flags, spread like umbrellas, rush by like dragons or serpents.

Under the pines are many clumps of bushes or thickets of vines and creepers, their leaves and tendrils so inter-woven that they shut out the sun and moon and no light reaches the ground. Even in the hottest days of summer the breeze here is like autumn. I have laid a path of white stones so that one can go in and out of the area.

Five paces north of my hut the cliff rises up in layers, heaped in stones and full of pits and hollows, bulges and projections. A jumble of trees and plants blanket it, a mass of dense green shade with here and there festoons of red fruit. I don't know what they're called, but they stay the same color all year round. There is also a bubbling spring and some tea plants. If you used the water from the spring to brew tea, and people with a taste for such things happened along, they could amuse themselves for a whole day.

East of the hut is a waterfall, the water tumbling down from a height of three feet, splashing by the corner of the stairs, then running off in a stone channel. In twilight and at dawn it's the color of white silk, and at night it makes a sound like jade pendants or a lute or harp.

The west side of the hut leans against the base of the northern cliff where it juts out to the west, and there I've rigged a trough of split bamboo to lead water from the spring in the cliff, carry it across to my hut, and divide the flow into little channels so that it falls from the eaves and wets the paving, a steady stream of strung pearls, a gentle mist like rain or dew, dripping down and soaking things or blowing far off in the wind.

On four sides these are the sights that meet my eyes and ears, that my shoes and walking stick take me to: in spring the blossoms of Brocade Valley, in summer the clouds of Stone Gate Ravine, in autumn the moon over Tiger Creek, in winter the snows on Incense Burner Peak. Now sharply seen, now hidden, in clear or cloudy weather; concealed, revealed, in twilight or at dawn; undergoing a thousand changes, assuming ten thousand forms. I could never finish describing them or capturing them in words.

And now here I am, master of a place like this, with all these objects offering me understanding, each after its own kind. How could I be anything but happy with my surroundings and at peace within, my body at rest, my mind content! Long ago Hui-yng, Hui-yaan, Tsung Ping, Lei Tz'u-tsung, eighteen men in all, came to this mountain, grew old and died here without ever going home. Though they lived a thousand years ago, I can understand what was their hearts, because I'm here too.

You clear spring, you white rocks, listen to what I say.

Written by Po-Chi-i, in the eleventh year of the Yian-ho era (816)