Among the writings from the Dunhuang Caves, discovered in the twentieth century, are the Zen equivalent of the Dead Sea Scrolls—ancient texts unknown for centuries, revealing a never-before-seen facet of Zen. The Ceasing of Notions is one such text. It takes a unique form: a dialogue between two imaginary figures, a master and his disciple, in which the disciple tenaciously pursues the master with follow-up questions that propel the dialogue toward ever more profound insights. And—as will quickly become clear—these questions prove to be none other than the reader’s very own. Soko Morinaga brings alive this compact and brilliant text with his own vivid commentary.

This volume also includes a generous selection from Morinaga’s acclaimed autobiography Novice to Master: An Ongoing Lesson in the Extent of My Own Stupidity.

Praise for Novice to Master

“'It has a soft poignancy and a certain presence within a tale well-told.'”
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“A real gem.”
—Tricycle: The Buddhist Review

The CEASING of NOTIONS

AN EARLY ZEN TEXT FROM THE DUNHUANG CAVES
WITH SELECTED COMMENTS

SOKO MORINAGA
author of NOVICE TO MASTER

with an introduction by MARTIN COLLCUTT
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THE CEASING OF NOTIONS
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THE ORIGINAL TEXT AND THE TRANSLATION

The Ceasing of Notions is the title given to the translation of one of the Chinese texts from Dunhuang, which are called the Jue-guan lun in Chinese and Zekkanron in Japanese. The vast caves near Dunhuang, an oasis on the ancient Silk Road in the Gansu province of western China, also known as the Mogao Caves and the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, comprised a network of 492 ancient temples. From the fourth until the fourteenth century, Buddhist monks at Dunhuang—who used the remote caves as places for prayer and meditation in their search for enlightenment—collected scriptures, sacred paintings, and statues from western Asia and Tibet. Pilgrims passing through the area painted murals covering some four hundred and fifty thousand square feet inside the caves. Construction of the Buddhist cave shrines began around 366 CE as places to store scriptures and works of art. The caves thus came to serve as repositories for thousands of sacred texts and to contain some of the finest examples of early Buddhist art spanning a period of a thousand years.

» I «
Sometime after the eleventh century, some of the caves were walled off and used as storehouses for used and damaged manuscripts and religious objects. They remained virtually unknown until the early twentieth century. Then, in the early 1900s, a Chinese Daoist named Wang Yuanlu, who was acting as the guardian of some of these cave temples, discovered a walled-up area beside a corridor leading to a main cave. Behind the wall was a small cave stuffed with an enormous hoard of manuscripts and paintings on hemp, silk, or paper dating from 406 to 1002 CE. These included ancient Buddhist texts in Chinese and other Asian languages. Among them were several manuscript copies of the text offered here as *The Ceasing of Notions*.

Around 1907, Wang Yuanlu sold many of the ancient scrolls to Western travelers exploring the Silk Road, including Sir Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot, who eagerly acquired these rare Buddhist texts and carried them back to Europe. The Japanese Buddhist scholars D. T. Suzuki and Kuno Horyu, among others, seem to have rediscovered copies of the text in Pelliot’s collection in the early 1930s.

Discussing, as it does, the path to enlightenment, this text has long had an important place in Chinese and Japanese Zen thought and practice. This text has also been partially translated into English by John R. McRae in his illuminating essay “The Ox-head School of Chinese Ch’an Buddhism: From Early Ch’an to the Golden Age.” McRae’s essay is a valuable study of the Ox-head school of early Chinese Chan (Zen) from which the *Jue-
INTRODUCTION

*guan lun* seems to have emerged. McRae discusses problems of establishing the text and its authorship; it has been variously attributed to Bodhidharma, Shen Hui, the legendary Ox-head school founder Niutou Farong, or—most likely perhaps—a later anonymous member of the school sometime during the late eighth century. The Japanese version of the ancient text has been translated into German under the title *Dialog über das Auslöschen der Anschauung* by Ursula Jarand, abbess of the Zen monastery Daishuin West in northern California. Ursula practiced Zen in Kyoto under the guidance of Soko Morinaga Roshi for many years. Her German translation, like this one, incorporates a Japanese commentary on the text by Soko Morinaga Roshi.

Venerable Myokyo-ni, who founded the Zen Centre in London on her return from training at Daitokuji in Kyoto, where she met Soko Morinaga Roshi, felt a strong affinity with this text. She recognized its importance and the value of Morinaga Roshi’s commentary as a training aid for Zen students. Therefore this present translation, made by the Venerable Myokyo-ni and Michelle Bromley, takes into account earlier German, English, and Japanese translations but places more emphasis on accessibility and helpfulness to readers who are practicing Zen, or interested in Zen, than on severe literalness or heavy scholarly apparatus. To this end, the title of the Chinese text translated rather abstractly by one scholar as *A Dialogue on the Contemplation Extinguished* and by McRae as *A Treatise on the Transcendence of Cognition* is rendered simply as *The Ceasing of Notions*, which
is both close to the spirit of the original Chinese title, Jue-guan lun, and expressive of the central Buddhist and Zen issue discussed throughout the text, namely the shedding of the delusions and notions that veil the truth of immanent buddhahood. In the interests of accessibility, too, Chinese Chan terms and personalities are given in their Japanese readings. Moreover, the Japanese terms are presented as simply as possible to Western readers; macrons are not used to distinguish long vowel sounds in Japanese. Readers who are looking for an academic discussion of the Jue-guan lun text and its relation to the development of early Chan should refer to the McRae article or scholarly treatments and textual studies by Tokiwa and others.4

The Jue-guan lun (The Ceasing of Notions) in its earliest form was a series of brief questions about the practice of the Buddhist Way and the attainment of understanding by a novice, known in Japanese as Emmon and in Chinese as Yuanmen, and the responses by his teacher, the monk known in Japanese as Nyuri and in Chinese as Ruli. Emmon’s questions express or reveal his clinging to “notions” of “delusions” about the Way and the attainment of true understanding. Nyuri’s answers, often enigmatic, are intended to encourage Emmon to shed his notions and recognize the truth of his buddhahood, which has always been his, if he would only see it. Because the questions and answers are often terse and their full implications difficult for a reader to grasp, it is very helpful to have the straightforward, insightful commentary provided here by Soko Morinaga Roshi.
THE ZEN LITERATURE OF
QUESTION, ANSWER, AND COMMENTARY

As readers respond to the challenges of Emmon’s questions, ponder the implications of Nyuri’s responses, and reflect on the wider understanding provided by Morinaga Roshi’s comments, they will quickly realize that this text, in its original form, and with the added commentary by Morinaga Roshi, is an early example of a form of “question and answer” literature, and of a “literature of commentary,” that has played such an important role in the transmission of Buddhist teaching, and especially of Zen Buddhism. I am thinking here of the various collections of Zen “cases” known as koans (gong-an) and the commentaries on those koans that have come down to us. In some texts the commentary was in the form of a verse. These cases and the comments on them have served to make lay, as well as monastic, practitioners ponder the meaning of their lives and their search for understanding through Buddhism, and Zen, and they have helped to keep the tradition alive, accessible, and expansive over time.

Japanese monks like Eisai (1141–1215) and Dogen (1200–1253), who practiced Zen in China in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, brought some of these koan collections back to Japan; they were used by the many Chinese Zen masters who came to Japan in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries and helped to establish the Rinzai transmission of Zen as a vibrant expression of Buddhism in Japan. Dogen, who established the Soto tradition of Zen in Japan, is sometimes said to have rejected koan study in favor of purely practicing shikantaza, or “just sitting”—but in his writings he frequently included koans from the old Chinese collections, and, in some cases, added his own commentary to them. As William Bodiford points out in his Soto Zen in Medieval Japan, Dogen used more than 580 koans in his teachings. In the Kana Shobogenzo, Dogen elaborates on 55 koans, quoting them in their entirety, and he refers to some of them more than 280 times.6 Later, in the mid-Tokugawa period, two of the greatest Zen masters of early modern Japan, Hakuin Ekaku of the Rinzai school of Zen (1685–1768) and Tenkei Denson of the Soto sect of Zen (1648–1735), wrote commentaries on the Blue Cliff Record.7

SOKO MORINAGA ROSHI

The very accessible and helpful commentary on The Ceasing of Notions provided in this volume was added by Soko Morinaga Roshi (1925–1995), one of the most
revered Japanese Rinzai Zen masters of his generation, and one who has trained American and European as well as Japanese students of Zen. And, as we have seen, Morinaga Roshi’s commentary may be placed in a long and distinguished tradition of Zen questioning and commentary regarding the self and the search for true self-understanding.

As a young man Morinaga Roshi found himself adrift and unsure of what he really wanted to do in post–World War II Japanese society. Drawn to Zen practice, he decided to become a Zen monk in Kyoto. He began his Zen training in his early twenties, in 1948, at Daitokuji under Goto Zuigan (1879–1965), formerly abbot of the Rinzai Zen monastery of Myoshinji and at that time abbot of Daitokuji. Morinaga trained and practiced at the monastery of Daitokuji from 1949 to 1963, becoming the head monk in the monk’s hall. He was the Dharma successor to Oda Sesso Roshi (1901–1966), a disciple of Goto Zuigan, who succeeded Zuigan as abbot of Daitokuji.

In 1965 Morinaga Roshi assumed the abbacy of the monastery of Daishuin in Kyoto. Daishuin was a small community of six or seven monk-disciples living a Zen life with their teacher. At Daishuin, Roshi built a Zen meditation hall that was open to laypeople in the area, including foreign students. On Sundays he gave talks on Zen, teisho or Dharma lectures, at Daishuin, which were also open to lay visitors. In these teisho he might use classic Zen texts such as the Platform Sutra, but his
talks were always down-to-earth and directed at bringing Zen understanding into the lives and experiences of his listeners. Daishuin was a subtemple of the much larger Myoshinji, and Morinaga Roshi was for many years the monks’ hall roshi for the Myoshinji monks. He went on to serve as the president of Hanazono University in Kyoto, the primary training university of the Rinzai School in Japan. As his reputation as a Zen master grew within Japan, he traveled to Hokkaido and other parts of the country to lead meditation retreats for monks and laypeople.

Morinaga Roshi had a number of Western students, among them Thomas Minick (Shaku Daijo) and Ursula Jarand (Myotsu Daishi), both students of his for many years at Daishuin. Shaku Daijo was ordained there as a Zen monk in 1979. Thomas and Ursula were married by Roshi, then came to the United States, and together planned and built Daishuin West in Humboldt County in northern California, which was inaugurated in 1996 as a Western counterpart to Daishuin in Kyoto and is a Zen temple in the Myoshinji line. Morinaga Roshi did not live to attend the opening ceremony of Daishuin West, but he did see and approve the plans for the monastery before his death.

Roshi also made annual visits of several weeks each summer to England to lead Zen practice and lecture on selected Zen texts at the Buddhist Society’s annual summer schools. In this he was responding to an invitation from the Venerable Myokyo-ni, whom he had known for
many years. Myokyo-ni had practiced Zen at Daitokuji for twelve years from 1960 under Oda Sesso Roshi and, after his death, under his successor Sojun Kannun. Morinaga was also in training at Daitokuji and serving as the head monk there.

Several of Morinaga Roshi’s books and essays on Zen have been translated into German and English. Now out of print, *Pointers to Insight: Life of a Zen Monk*, which draws on his own experiences as a monk searching for insight, was published in 1985 by the Zen Centre, London. In a somewhat different form, this material was translated by Belenda Attaway Yamakawa and published in 2002 as *Novice to Master: An Ongoing Lesson in the Extent of My Own Stupidity*. Three years later Ursula Jarand’s German translation of the *Zekkanron*, with Morinaga Roshi’s commentary, was translated into English by Myokyo-ni and Michelle Bromley and published by the Zen Centre as *A Treatise on the Ceasing of Notions: An Early Text from Tun-huang*.

Each of these books presents Zen thought and practice in a very direct and stimulating way. *Novice to Master*, for example, which draws on the experiences of his own severe training in Zen and his life as a teacher, opens with a section devoted to his experiences and perceptions as a novice monk: “The prospect of my own death.” In his characteristically direct and challenging way, Roshi goes to the heart of things in the introduction to *Novice to Master*.
If I were to sum up the past forty years of my life, the time since I became a monk, I would have to say that it has been an ongoing lesson in the extent of my own stupidity. When I speak of my stupidity, I do not refer to something that is innate, but rather to the false impressions that I have cleverly stockpiled, layer upon layer, in my imagination.

Whenever I travel to foreign countries to speak, I am invariably asked to focus on one central issue: Just what is satori, just what is enlightenment? This thing called satori, however, is a state that one can understand only through experience. It cannot be grasped or explained through words alone.

By way of example, there is a proverb that says, “To have a child is to know the heart of a parent.” Regardless of how a parent may demonstrate the parental mind to a child, that child cannot completely understand it. Only when children become parents themselves do they fully know the heart of a parent. Such an understanding can be likened to enlightenment, although enlightenment is far deeper still.

“The purpose of practice,” writes Morinaga, “is not to increase knowledge but to scrape the scales off the eyes, to pull the plugs out of the ears. Through practice one comes to see reality. And although it is said that ‘no medicine can cure fully,’ whatever prompts me to realize ‘I was a fool’ is, in fact, just such a medicine.”
MORINAGA ROSHI’S COMMENTARY ON
*The Ceasing of Notions*

Let us now look more closely at the text of, and Morinaga Roshi’s commentary on, *The Ceasing of Notions*. Here, using one or two examples, I will try to point out some of the ways in which Morinaga makes this elusive ancient text accessible to readers who, like Emmon, have many questions to ask about their own search for the Way of the Buddha and their possible attainment of enlightenment.

*The Ceasing of Notions* is clearly intended as a practical straightforward translation of, and guide to, an early Zen text that crystallizes many of the essentials of Zen thought, and one that is as relevant now as it was in Tang dynasty China. The work itself is in the form of a dialogue or series of questions and answers between two imaginary figures: Master Nyuri and his disciple Emmon.

Although the original Chinese text is undivided, the Japanese editors have divided it into fifteen sections. This division is followed in this English translation of *The Ceasing of Notions*. Each section clusters questions and answers around a principal topic. Section I, for instance, deals with the central question of finding the Great Way of the Buddha and pacifying the heart (or, as it was translated by McRae, the mind—the Chinese character *xin* is the heart, moral nature, the mind, the affections, and the intention, but it is translated here as *heart* throughout):
The Great Way is without limit, fathomless and subtle, beyond comprehension, beyond words.

Master Nyuri (whose name means “Entrance into the Principle”) and his disciple Emmon (“Gate of Affinities”) discuss the truth.

The enlightened Zen master Nyuri is guiding his disciple Emmon in his search for self-understanding. Their conversation opens with Nyuri’s presentation of the Great Way (of the truth of the universe) as “without limit, fathomless and subtle, beyond comprehension, beyond words.”

In his comment Roshi discusses *fathomless and subtle* by raising the issue of causation in Buddhism, expressed in the Japanese term *innen*, which he explains in terms of its two constituent characters: *in*, “inner cause,” and *en*, the factors contributing to that cause. And then, to clarify this rather abstruse distinction, he introduces the analogy of a bell in which the ability to make sound is its *in* and the factors contributing to that sound—the clapper, the metal, the size of the bell, etc.—are the *en*. And when they meet the sound of the bell is manifest.

Just as Master Nyuri uses “skillful means” to shake Emmon out of his confusion and into self-awakening, so the Roshi too uses skillful means to clarify the text, and its true meaning, for his students and the reader. He uses traditional Japanese analogies like the bell and its ability to make sound, examples from daily life, and natural phenomena; he explains in detail Buddhist terminology and formulae that are only briefly referred to.
in the text, such as emptiness, thusness, karma, and the four erroneous views of phenomena. In the course of his commentary he makes us familiar with passages and ideas from other sutras and introduces us to many of the sayings and doings of Zen masters over the ages. Roshi’s comments on Master Nyuri’s questions and Emmon’s responses help readers to find their own awakening and true nature in the ceasing of notions. In conclusion Roshi comments:

“When even the last traces are gone” is when all the dirt of delusions has been washed off, together with the soap of the teaching, training, and enlightenment, and nothing at all remains—no smell of Zen, no ideology, no philosophy, no Buddha. Then the true nature functions freely and without any obstacles.

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NOTES
2. Ibid., 173.