

The Thirteenth Monk

On Walking Last

Joshu was a monk who had once been an army officer.

Though he could have walked among the seniors, he insisted, habitually, on walking last when traveling with other monks. "Because of the things I've done and seen," he would say.

Once, while traveling with twelve fellow monks, they were stopped at a militia checkpoint.

The officer in charge said, "In our great country, we have no place for superstition."

Raising his pistol, he asked the first monk, "Give me one reason I should not shoot you."

The monk bowed

- Buddha be praised.

The officer shot him.

He asked the next, and the next.
Each bowed.
Each praised the Buddha.
Each fell.

At last it was Joshu's turn.

The officer said,
"Give me one reason I should not shoot you."

Joshu smiled, bowed,
and said:

"Because we all know you are out of bullets."

Buddha be praised.

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The monk made the sign of the cross

- God be praised.

The officer shot him.

He asked the next, and the next.
Each made the sign of the cross.
Each praised God.
Each fell.

At last it was Joshu's turn.

The officer said,
"Give me one reason I should not shoot you."

Joshu smiled, made the sign of the cross,
and said:

"Because we all know you are out of bullets."

God be praised.