

The Novice

A man from a foreign country sought admission to a monastery. The master refused to admit him. A novice, who spoke the foreigner's language, was sent to inform him.

"The master denies you admission," the novice told the man. "He does not speak your language."

The man said, "He can teach me without using words."

"How can he teach you without using words?"

"Because there is nothing to teach."

The novice returned and translated the conversation for the master.

The master asked, "Is the man still sitting by the gate?"

"No," the novice answered. "He left without awaiting your reply."

"And why, might I ask, did he leave?"

"He said there is nothing to learn."

"That is quite right."

"So he does not need you as a teacher?"

"Indeed. He already knows that."

"Why did he wish to join the monastery?"

"He had no reason."

"Is that why you refused to admit him?"

"No."

"Then why did you reject him?"

"Please wash your bowl," the master said.

The novice did as he was told and attained enlightenment. Soon thereafter he left the monastery.