

THE SOURCE OF ZEN: WHO TRANSMITS WHAT?

Lineage & Transmission in Zen Buddhism

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INTRODUCTION

Pardon me for breaking the silence of this retreat. It is a great joy to be here with all of you.

I will discuss transmission and the source of Zen. Concentrated zazen is a crucial matter — indeed, it is what we are doing here. Transmission, on the other hand, may sound more technical and less important. As you are about to see, however, the living transmission is the heart and soul of Zen. Using “Who transmits what?” as a theme, let us all directly inquire into our own fundamental practice.

[Writes on the board] This is a very common Chinese character, pronounced shin or kokoro in Japanese. It means something like Geist in German, “heart,” “mind” or sometimes “selfless self.”

Transmission of Mind by Mind: Traditional Meaning

One well-known expression about transmission in Zen Buddhism is *Ishin Denshin* in Japanese, literally “Using mind to transmit mind,” or “Transmitting mind with mind.” The same character I wrote on the board is used twice here. Who, or what, is this? And what is being transmitted? In my discussion — which will be at the same time a thoroughgoing deconstruction — I will introduce a number of names and terms. But just penetrate this one and everything else will follow naturally and easily.

Now, what is this transmission of mind by mind in Zen? Here is a traditional explanation by the 20th century Rinzai master Miura Isshū. He is talking about *kenshō*, or awakening:

The experience of *kensho* has been handed down directly from Shakamuni Buddha through successive generations of patriarchs to men of the present by means of the ‘transmission of Mind by mind.’ As long as the direct experience of *kensho* continues to be thus transmitted from generation to generation, Zen will not disappear, regardless of whether great temples and religious establishments exist or not.⁽¹⁾

Here we can see the importance, for the Zen tradition, of transmission through a lineage from generation to generation, believed to have begun about 2,500 years ago with Shakamuni, or even earlier, and continuing unbroken up to today. In the detailed notes of the same book, we find the following standard interpretation of this mind-to-mind transmission:

The phrase states the pivot of the Zen teaching method, a method which demands that the teacher have a student as much as that the student have a teacher. At the moment the disciple’s mind reaches the same state of intuitive understanding as that of the master, a fusion of minds takes place, and

the understanding of the disciple becomes one with that of the master, or, in the traditional words, the master ‘transmits’ his mind to the disciple. No words are employed in this transmission, which, in Zen, is considered to be the only method by which the ultimate truth of Buddhism can be correctly handed down from generation to generation.(2)

This is the gist of the Zen rhetoric on mind-to-mind transmission. Metaphorically, it is spoken of as “Pouring water from one vessel into another exactly like it.”(3) There is even the statement “Anyone of our [Zen] sect who does not create a single dharma-heir in his lifetime will surely fall into hell at death.”(4)

Another pivotal Zen expression concerning transmission is the one attributed to Hyakujō [Ch.: Po-chang 720-814]. When he transmitted the Dharma to Ōbaku [Huang-po d. 850?], who in turn was the teacher of Rinzai [Lin-chi d.867], Hyakujō stated, “Insight equaling the master’s diminishes the master’s virtue by half; only insight surpassing the master’s is worthy of receiving the transmission.”(5) So, in one sense it seems that the disciple has to identify with the master, yet the disciple must also surpass the master. What about this?

If we go back even further to a work attributed to Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of Chinese Zen, “The three worlds [of desire, form, and formlessness] all arise from and return to the One Mind. From Buddha to Buddha, mind is transmitted by mind.”(6) As you can see, the same terms are being used, but it is getting a bit confusing, isn’t it? It seemed clear that the mind of the master is transmitted to the mind of the disciple, and yet the first patriarch Bodhidharma himself speaks in the same breath of “One Mind.” Is this what is transmitted — and transmitting?

Five generations later, when the fifth patriarch handed the patriarchal robes to the sixth patriarch, according to the Platform Sutra he said, “Dharma is transmitted by mind with mind — this [Dharma] must be awakened to by oneself.”(7) Here, in the same breath we find the need for transmission — and it’s being realized by oneself. What are we talking about? Who transmits what?

Transmission certificates and the master’s personal belongings like robes, a bowl, or other implements such as a backrest or armrest, were sometimes handed over as symbols of the transmission. In spite of rhetoric to the contrary, in early Zen history, written texts such as The Lankavatara Sutra or The Diamond Sutra were handed over as symbols of so-called Dharma transmission.(8) We will return to these issues later.

Transmitting the Untransmittable:

Deeper Meaning of Transmission & Lineage

If we dig a little deeper we find the expression “transmitting the untransmittable” or “the transmission of what cannot be transmitted.” Rinzai and other outstanding masters, when asked what the transmission is, spoke thus.(9) In a number of cases in the standard koan collection The Blue Cliff Record, we find statements to the effect that “Dharma is not transmitted by Buddhas and patriarchs [lit.: the thousand sages, holy ones].” But aren’t they precisely the ones who were supposed to have transmitted it? Could it be that the living truth is not, cannot be, transmitted, even by Buddhas and patriarchs?

For example, in case three of The Blue Cliff Record the superlative early Chinese master Baso [Ma-tsu 709-788] is dying and the monastery superintendent, who has not yet awakened, comes to inquire as to his master’s condition. Baso kindly responds, “Sun-faced Buddha, Moon-faced Buddha” (i.e., Some Buddhas live thousands of years, some a mere

night). In the commentary on this case, we find, “It is not transmitted by Buddhas and patriarchs, yet students trouble themselves with forms like monkeys grasping at reflections.” A wondrous and fitting comment for this case.

In case twelve a monk asks “What is Buddha?” and the master responds, “Three pounds of flax.” Maybe at that moment flax was being weighed to make robes or something, we don’t know. In the opening pointer for this case we find, “It is not transmitted by Buddhas and patriarchs.” Do you see?

But perhaps the best illustration for present purposes is case seven: Here a monk, named Echō in Japanese, asks the same question, “What is Buddha?” This time a master responds, “You are, Echō.” That is the whole koan — the whole question, and the whole answer. It looks like an elementary language lesson: Robert asks what is Buddha. The teacher answers, “You, Robert!” The opening pointer for this koan begins, “It is not transmitted by Buddhas and patriarchs.” Very suggestive, isn’t it? Tell me, was it transmitted or not? What does it mean to transmit the Dharma?

Engo [Yüan-wu 1063-1135], who wrote these pointers and commentaries, even expressed it as a charming folk saying: “The secret of the gods is not transmitted from father to son.”(10)

Shakamuni’s Transmission in the Zen Tradition

Now let’s look at the transmission from Shakamuni to Mahakasyapa and see if it’s the same or different. But before doing that, let me ask one more question: Where did Shakamuni get the transmission from? According to the records, of course, he realized it for himself, although some records do speak of a number of Buddhas prior to Shakamuni. But it is clear that even though Shakamuni had outstanding meditation teachers, he finally left them, went off on his own, and realized the truth by himself. But then, he is different from us — after all he was the Buddha, right? And we all know what Buddha is.... Hmmm.

Anyway, according to the Zen tradition, Shakamuni handed over the Dharma to Mahakasyapa this way: Instead of speaking to the great congregation assembled, Shakamuni merely held up a flower that he had been given. Everyone waits for his enlightening words, his Dharma. Only Mahakasyapa realizes that Shakamuni has already expressed it all, so he naturally smiles. Shakamuni then states that he now transmits the Dharma to Mahakasyapa. In another standard koan collection known as the Mumonkan or “Gateless Barrier” we find the following comment on this sixth case:

Yellow-faced Gotama [Shakamuni] is certainly outrageous. He turns the noble into the lowly, sells dog flesh advertised as sheep’s head. I thought there was something interesting in it. However, at that time if everyone in the assemblage had smiled, to whom would the True Dharma have been handed? Or again, if Kasho [Mahakasyapa] had not smiled, would the True Dharma have been transmitted? If you say that the True Dharma can be transmitted, the yellow-faced old man with his loud voice deceived simple villagers. If you say that it cannot be transmitted, then why was Kasho alone approved?(11)

An excellent commentary, right to the point. All beings already have the Buddha nature, so there is no need for any such transmission — Shakamuni is certainly deceiving the masses. And yet Shakamuni approved only one. Why? According to the 20th century Rinzai master Shibayama Zenkei, “For Zen, which is solely based on one’s own religious experience and denies initiation or inheritance in any form at all, this concept of transfer [i.e., spatial-temporal “transmission”] is an inexcusable misapprehension.”(12) A complete mistake, a

“holy lie,” so to speak.

To really bring this point home, let’s see how Zen master Ummon [Yünmên d.949] deals with it. Ummon tells the legend of Shakamuni’s birth, how he pointed with one hand up to heaven and the other down to earth and said, “Heaven above, heaven below — I alone am the Honored One.” How do you respond to this most marvelous birth and first teaching of the world-honored one? Here is what Ummon then said: “Had I been there, I would have killed him with one blow and thrown his corpse into the maw of a hungry dog — thus to bring peace on earth!”⁽¹³⁾ Why did Ummon, one of the great Dharma transmitters, have to say such a thing? Was he destroying the transmission, or was he preserving it? Can the transmission be destroyed or preserved?

Shakamuni’s Transmission in Earlier Records

This last statement by Ummon may sound a far cry from earlier Buddhism, but let’s see if it’s really so. Perhaps the most famous words attributed to Shakamuni, found in the Anguttara Nikaya of the Pali Canon, state that one must be a refuge to oneself and not rely on any other. He also is said to have urged his disciples to test for themselves — even what he himself teaches — and not to accept what he or anyone says merely because they are authorities or great teachers, or because they are considered wise. You must test for yourself. Now, what kind of transmission is that? Of course he is not using Chinese Zen rhetoric about killing newborn Buddhas and throwing their bodies to the dogs. But is the core message so different?

According to the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, at the end of his life Shakamuni clearly rejected any notion of transmitting the Dharma, or of authorizing anyone to lead the Sangha or Buddhist community. (The Mahakasyapa transmission legend mentioned above was a much later accretion.) More importantly, he even rejected the idea that he had ever been such an authority himself. Zen scholar John McRae comments that the role of “spiritual figurehead that [Shakamuni] the Buddha specifically refused to fill was essentially identical to the role of the patriarch or Ch’an [Zen] master in later Chinese Buddhism.”⁽¹⁴⁾ Perhaps Ummon had good reason to make his devastating declaration about the newborn holy of holies.

Also in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta are the last words said to have been spoken by Shakamuni, to the effect that all conditioned things are subject to decay; attain perfection through diligence. If all things are subject to decay, all is impermanent, how could something be transmitted without change for 2,500 years? Again I ask, what is being transmitted?

In Zen Buddhism much is made of the “Dharma seal” in connection with this transmission. It has become an almost esoteric, mystical entity. And yet, in earlier Buddhism “Dharma seals” simply referred to the basic truths of Buddhism, the marks or characteristics of all conditioned things: 1. without permanence, 2. without ease (sometimes translated as “suffering”), 3. without self. Now, if everything without exception is impermanent, diseased, and selfless, how is this to be transmitted? Later a fourth was added: 4. Nirvana is composed. In later Tathâgatagarbha thought, these seals were turned on their head and became: 1. permanence, 2. joy, 3. self, 4. purity (in the sense that Nirvana is originally free from incidental dust, desires, attachment, and ignorance). Has the transmission remained one and the same, or has it changed?

Discussion

It’s clear: As long as we persist in grasping onto the form alone, all is in vain. Even if we encounter the greatest teacher, unless we realize the teacher in ourselves, as our selfless self, all is lost. One of the great developments in Buddhism, which we now tend to

associate with Chinese Zen, was the turning away from sutras, rituals, and other forms and instead turning directly to another living person who has realized it himself. Of course this is not unique to Zen; it can be considered a crucial aspect of the birth of Buddhism as a religion. The pre-Buddhist guru in India shows it is a universal trait of living religious practice.

Direct human contact is indeed precious. This is part of the immense value of “transmission-lineage” in the Zen tradition. But finally, it cannot be given from without; one must attain it from within. One of the dangers of taking this transmission too literally, of grasping onto its symbolic, cultic, esoteric form, is that one becomes blinded to the living transmission that is going on all the time, everywhere. When you look at a flower, or encounter another — any other — is this being transmitted or not? You’ve all read some Zen literature — what encounter does not count? People can come to this through any act: seeing, hearing, remembering, forgetting, smiling, dropping something or picking it up.

A face-to-face encounter with a teacher who has already awakened can serve as a great inspiration to the unawakened; it also serves to acknowledge and confirm, verify, or authenticate what the student has awakened to for himself or herself. Again, this is of immense value. I myself have gone through this in a Rinzai training monastery in Kyoto for the last twenty-five years. But what is the basis? In the preface to the Mumonkan we find, “Nothing that enters though the gate can be family treasure.” One must first awaken on one’s own, then the teacher can verify it, although the two are sometimes not clearly distinguished in the traditional literature since they are meant to go hand in hand. The Zen school is called the “Buddha-Mind Sect” — again, the same Chinese character appears — not because this mind is transmitted from master to disciple but because it is a selfless self-awakening of mind, to mind, by mind. Not relying on some sacred sutra or text, or on anything — or anyone — with form: “Using mind to transmit mind.”

This transmission is not a matter of something being transmitted from someone to another, like ESP or some blatant spiritual materialism, although sometimes it sounds like that and occasionally it has even been reduced to little more than that. At its worst, such a “transmission” is a dangerous, mystical (in the worst sense of the term), esoteric cult that can only be handed on under certain circumstances to a certain person who has fulfilled certain cultic rites and requirements.

In a very real sense, obtaining some “transmission” from another is not possible — or necessary. The transmission is truly untransmittable, as mentioned earlier. I will give some dramatic examples in a moment, but you do not get anything from a real teacher. No one transmits anything to anyone. You can’t get it from another. Of course, you can’t obtain it from yourself either. The transmission is breaking through that very division and penetrating to the depths, to put it bluntly. Then that transmission can occur with anything, anyone, anywhere, at any time. There is no thing and no one that does not transmit Dharma. That is why our fundamental koan finally works, why mutual inquiry and one-on-one ultimately works.

Without fully and finally letting go one’s self-with-form, there can be no transmission — even if one has received innumerable transmission certificates from various lineages. The basis and source of transmission in Zen is the awakening to one’s selfless self. And this emerges precisely from the dropping away of self, once and for all. Remember the character I wrote on the board? That’s it. No one transmits anything to anyone; in other words, shin or kokoro transmits kokoro to kokoro by way of kokoro. That’s all.

In The Lankavatara Sutra and elsewhere the metaphor of ocean and waves is used. Each individual grasps himself only as a particular wave. As a wave we come and go, although we don’t know from where and to where. This is the incessant struggle and disease of life-and-death for the self-as-wave. Religious practice is the wave realizing itself as

none other than the water of the boundless ocean. Because everything also shares this same nature, contact with anything or anyone can provide this breakthrough. This is a central thesis of Chinese Zen.

Taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma (or living truth), and Sangha (or community) is not letting go of one set of forms and embracing another. It is letting go of oneself as wave and taking refuge in the ocean itself.

In the logic of The Diamond Sutra, “I am not I, therefore I am I.” It may sound contradictory or even nonsensical, but it is not. When I-as-wave realize my true nature as the ocean itself, I do not cease to be a wave. Rather, I truly become myself as ocean-wave. In terms of transmission, one does not lose one’s identity in some kind of mystical fusing — although Zen masters and scholars sometimes mistakenly speak that way. Nor is it one wave identifying with another wave, be it a great enlightened one or whatever. It is wave realizing itself as the vast and boundless ocean. Being nothing whatsoever, I am not I — I am the formless form of the ocean itself.

Take a flower: where does it come from? Does it grow from out of itself? For the flower to be, it has to grow from a seed, from water and nutrients in the earth, from sunshine. A flower — just like everything — is not itself; therefore, as formless form it grows, blossoms, then its petals fall. How wondrous!

Our fundamental koan directly points to the fact that no wave as wave will do. Penetrate to the vast and boundless ocean itself. Likewise, our practice of mutual inquiry or one-on-one is not a deep or high wave, even a tidal wave, meeting another wave; it is ocean encountering itself.

Transmission: Bodhidharma, Sekitô, & Rinzai

To show that I am not making any of this up, indeed, I am giving expression to the Zen tradition at its best, let us briefly look at three seminal examples.

There is no better example than the transmission record from the first patriarch of Chinese Zen to the second. It can be found in case forty-one of the Mumonkan, so I will just give the pith here. An outstanding Chinese monk who had already studied the learning of his times — Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism — travels to Bodhidharma who is sitting in a cave in the mountains. The monk tells Bodhidharma that his mind — once again, the same Chinese character — is not at peace, and begs Bodhidharma to pacify him. What does Bodhidharma say? “Well, write your name down here son, sit in zazen like me, and in a few years I’ll transmit my Dharma to you, then you can be twenty-ninth in the patriarchal lineage.” Of course not. He directly points: “Bring forth this mind which is not at peace and I will set it at rest.” Eventually the monk returns and states, “I have searched for the mind, but it is, finally, unattainable.” Bodhidharma responds, “Now it has thoroughly been put to rest.” This monk became the second patriarch because he realized for himself that finally — and originally — there is no self to bring forth! He realized he is the ocean; because he was formerly stuck to himself as wave, whatever he did he could not find peace of mind. Rather than any so-called fusing of minds or religious instruction, however, Bodhidharma mercilessly — though mercifully — threw him back upon himself, for only then could it be resolved. Bodhidharma’s final confirmation is important of course, but the monk’s self-realization had to come first.

Another classic illustration is Sekitô [Shih-t’ou 700-790], one of the great early Chinese masters. Before the expression “this very mind is Buddha” became popular, Sekitô was already speaking that way. Finally one of his monks had to ask him, who then obtained the essential teachings of the sixth patriarch? This was just a few generations after the sixth patriarch, so it seems a natural question as to the legitimate transmission-lineage.

Sekitô responds, “He who understands Buddha Dharma obtains it.” “Did you obtain it, master?” asks the monk. Sekitô’s response, “I don’t understand the Buddha Dharma.” Sekitô, one of the great early masters, failed to get the Buddha Dharma — Do you see? But here is where the plot really thickens: Another monk now asks, but what about emancipation, the pure land, and Nirvana? These are the most sacred goals of the Buddhist path. If this very mind is the Buddha, and further, our master doesn’t even understand the Buddha Dharma, then what the hell are we doing training in this monastery! So the monk must ask about the noblest goals that he and his fellow monks have dedicated their lives to: What about emancipation, the pure land, and Nirvana?

“What about emancipation?” “Who binds you?”
“What about the Pure Land?” “Who defiles you?”
“What about Nirvana?” “Who put you in Samsara?”(15)

Sekitô answers as the ocean itself. And with it, all such questions are revealed to be groundless, untenable. When were you ever out of it or apart from it? Too bad Sekitô never got the transmission, though!

The third example is none other than Rinzai. His teaching from start to finish exemplifies true transmission, so I will give only a few examples. Once Rinzai was asked about the intention of Bodhidharma’s coming all the way from India to China. Was it not to transmit the Dharma? Rinzai’s response: “If there is any intention, he could never save even himself.” It could also be rendered, “If there is any intention, you can never save yourself.” The questioning continues: “If he had no intention, how did the second patriarch obtain the Dharma?” Rinzai: “To obtain is not to obtain.” We’ve heard that before. “If it is not obtained, what is the meaning of ‘not obtained’?” Rinzai spills open his guts and exposes his spleen:

It’s because you can’t stop your mind running about and seeking everywhere, like searching for your head with your head. Turn your own light upon yourself and never seek elsewhere, then you’ll know your body and mind are no different from Buddhas & patriarchs, and you’ll have nothing to do — this is obtaining the Dharma.(16)

When Ôbaku “transmitted the Dharma” to Rinzai he asked for the backrest and armrest of his teacher Hyakujô — the master who said that only someone whose insight supasses the master’s is worthy of receiving the transmission. Master Ôbaku is about to give Rinzai precious belongings of the revered Hyakujô as a sign of the transmission. How does Rinzai show his appreciation? Without a moment’s hesitation he calls out: “Attendant, light a fire!” No need for such trappings — Rinzai’s ready to burn the darned things. (Indeed: “Insight equaling the master’s diminishes the master’s virtue by half; only insight surpassing the master’s is worthy of receiving the transmission.”) Significantly, Ôbaku persists, “Be that as it may, take them with you anyway. In the future you’ll sit upon the tongue of every man on earth.”(17) Ôbaku cannot help but agree with Rinzai. Yet he also has the foresight to urge him to be circumspect, even as he confirms and encourages him.

Many of you know that when Rinzai was finally awakened after a long and arduous struggle he spontaneously burst out with the renowned, “Ah, is this all there is to Ôbaku’s Buddha Dharma!” That is the transmission. From a distance it may look quite splendid and mystical, but once you’ve seen it up close the priceless treasure is most ordinary and commonplace.

When Rinzai was about to die he warned his disciples not to let the True Dharma Eye

be extinguished. A monk asks how that could be, and Rinzai asks how the monk will respond when he is asked about it. The monk gives a shout (as Rinzai had often done). Then Rinzai gives his last words: “Who would have thought that my True Dharma Eye would be extinguished upon reaching this blind ass!”(18) Just as well that it did.

There are so many other excellent examples that I could mention, not only in Chinese Zen but also in Japanese Zen. But these will have to await another day.

The Lineage-Transmission Legend:

Why, from Where?

Why, and from where, did the lineage-transmission legend arise? As Zen begins to take root in the West many Zennists naturally are attracted to this myth; some even naively believe it is literally true. They think that obtaining accouterment associated with lineage-transmission somehow proves their Zen is authentic. Perhaps it just reflects a fundamental lack of awakening. A brief review of the historical development of the lineage-transmission legend will dispel some of the preposterous misconceptions surrounding it.

In the early Tang dynasty, a good 1,300 years ago, not just Zen, but other Buddhist schools were under pressure to at least prove their legitimacy, at best gain position and prestige from the vying political powers. The Chinese T'ien-t'ai [Jp.: Tendai] school was active in this before the nascent “Ch'an” or Zen school was. In spite of the “Separate transmission apart from scripture, Not depending on words and letters” rhetoric, as already mentioned, the “Zen school” had relied on sutras — The Lankavatara Sutra in the transmission from Bodhidharma to the second patriarch, and later The Diamond Sutra. But by the eighth century attempts were made to trace back directly to Shakamuni through a spiritual lineage-transmission.

In short, various “Zen groups” then created a number of conflicting lineage-transmission charts to try and gain legitimacy. These lineage charts were based on imperial cult lineage and modified Confucian ancestor worship. A “Buddha-family Line” was created to try and show that the present possessor was a direct spiritual descendent of Shakamuni. By tracing oneself back directly to Shakamuni rather than just to statements in a sutra, one could come out superior to the other Buddhist schools, and to other “illegitimate” lineages within the Zen school. Just as the emperor was the ruler over this world, the Zen patriarch was to be considered the ruler over the spiritual realm.

What we now naively view as “genuine” transmission-lineages in Zen Buddhism are largely dependent on vagaries of history and social-political plays for power. The pivotal figure is Katakū Jinne [Ho-tsê Shên-hui 670-762]. In an attempt to make himself the seventh patriarch, Jinne mounted an attack on the so-called “northern school” of Zen and argued forcefully for the legitimacy of his “southern school.” Using the obscurity of his teacher, now universally known as “the sixth patriarch,” to advantage, he based his attack on a strict patriarchal succession that he created, based on imperial cult lineage. Although the actual teachings of the two schools were virtually the same, Jinne denounced the teachings of the northern school. One of the reasons for his success was that he raised a huge amount of money — for military purposes — by selling a great number of ordination certificates in state-sponsored ceremonies.(19)

Some Further Problems Connected with
Lineage-Transmission

The fact that Buddhism gradually degenerated into ancestor worship and funeral Buddhism — services for the “departed soul” — is not unrelated to the lineage-transmission problems mentioned above. Likewise, the practice of erecting temples to protect the state,

the ludicrous notion of teachers standing in place of the Buddha, and sectarian rivalries mentioned above, just to name a few.

In Sôtô Zen in Japan, due to problems in the pyramid-like, hierarchic organization of temple lineage, a complex but crucial argument was made by Manzan Dôhaku [1636-1714] that formal transmission should be valid whether one is awakened or not. Another voice in this argument was Baihô Jikushin [1633-1707] who saw Dharma lineages as almost physical entities inhabiting the body, so that a second lineage would create a never-ending struggle within the person.⁽²⁰⁾ Dharma transmission has finally descended to spirit possession. Dokuan Genkô [1630-1698] argued unsuccessfully that awakening without a master was preferable to having a master without awakening. He even wrote:

When I carefully observe the transmission of the robe and the entrusting of the Dharma in the Zen school nowadays, [I see that] the name survives but the reality has long since disappeared. Today, those who inherit the wisdom-life of the Buddhas and patriarchs depend upon awakening by themselves without a master. Even if the name disappears, they are the only ones who inherit the reality.⁽²¹⁾

The upshot to all of this, in spite of Dôgen's best intentions, according to the Zen scholar William Bodiford: "qualifications for advanced rank required neither practice nor realization."⁽²²⁾

The problem is not, of course, limited to Sôtô Zen; Japanese Rinzai priests bought "certificates of enlightenment" in order to rise in the ranks to important government-sponsored positions. Look at the "Purple Robe Incident."⁽²³⁾ Again, all of this is connected with the problem at hand: lineage-transmission and the sectarian consciousness that it fosters. Zen scholar Michel Mohr, speaking of Japanese Zen, states:

The nature of sectarian consciousness at any particular time is especially evident in the prevailing attitudes toward Dharma transmission, since it is through the transmission process that the identity and integrity of the lineage is preserved. This is particularly important in view of the fact that during the Tokugawa period [1603-1867] the misuse of Dharma-succession practices had become a plague that affected the credibility of the entire Zen Buddhist clergy.⁽²⁴⁾

Final Discussion

What could be more absurd than introducing this nonsense to the West under the guise of "Zen"? What do transmission-lineages and divisive sect-consciousness have to do with Buddhism? We have already seen the sectarian rivalry between the northern and southern schools of Zen. There were others: between gradual & immediate teachings, Tathagata & Patriarch Zen, silent illumination & introspecting the koan, and so forth. These rivalries tend to sweep under the rug legitimate and crucial questions and problems, cover them over with one-sided and distorted dogmatic rhetoric. Back in the ninth century the extraordinary Chinese scholar-monk Shûmitsu [Tsong-mi 780-841] wrote that the disciples of the contending gradual and immediate Zen sects "treat each other as if they were blood enemies" while members of the southern and northern schools "hated each other."⁽²⁵⁾

The problems of sect-consciousness and lineage-transmission did not begin with the Zen sect, however; they have been with us from the very beginning. What were the causes

for schism in early Buddhism? According to the Second Buddhist Council, convened at Vaisali around 386B.C., about a hundred years after Shakamuni's death, the "false views" concerned 1. Whether an arhat has nocturnal emissions or not. 2. Whether an arhat is ignorant of some things or not. 3. Whether an arhat can be in doubt over some things or not. 4. Whether an arhat can awaken through another or not. 5. Whether an arhat cries out or not. Over the years, these questions were replaced by doctrine and dogma, and the leading monk who raised these questions came to be depicted, at least by rival schools, as a monster: it was recorded that he had incest with his mother, killed his father (first cardinal sin), a monk (second cardinal sin), then his mother (third cardinal sin). Now do we understand which side of the tracks we're supposed to be on? Again, the Mahayana tradition turns all of this completely on its head and gives a radically different interpretation of these "sins."

These are questions for us now: What is the relation between awakening and sexuality? Is an awakened person all-knowing, without doubt of any kind? These are crucial questions that we must ask and clarify for ourselves. The fourth question, whether one can awaken through another or not, is directly related to our present theme. And, indeed, one of the early commentaries states that an arhat "may be unaware of his own wisdom or supernatural power, and therefore needs to be initiated by others into the realization of that which he already possesses."(26) The problem has existed since the beginning. The question for us now is whether we close our eyes and accept the sectarian dogma, or bring the problems to life as our own and find real answers.

Chapter eleven of Genesis records the vain attempt to reach the heavens above by building a tower. I think the attempt to attain something through transmission-lineage is similar: the Tower of Babel, the Tunnel of Buddha. The dispersal into disparate languages in one parallels the division into rival sects in the other. Like the emperor's new clothes, lineage-transmission was created under false pretenses for selfish gain, formed from Chinese imperial lineage cults and ill-fitting remnants of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese fabric. You're free to wear them proudly if you wish, but don't confuse them with the naked body of Buddha.

The living transmission-lineage in Zen is precious indeed, as we have seen over and over in this presentation. The cult surrounding it is a veritable Pandora's box. This we have also seen. Freeing ourselves from sectarian rivalries, dogma, and superstitions surrounding transmission legends, we can join hands not only with other Zen Buddhists, but also with all Buddhists, indeed with all humanity. For humanity clearly and decisively awakening to no-self is the basis. This is not a matter of accepting some Zen or Buddhist dogma; it is reality awakening to itself. Here, all things transmit, and are transmitted to all things. Thank you.

[A revised version of lectures given throughout Europe and the United States in the summer of 1998.]

Notes

(1) Miura & Sasaki, Zen Dust, p. 38. (See bibliography below for details.)

- (2) _____, p. 231.
- (3) See for example Shibayama, Mumonkan, p. 60.
- (4) See Akizuki, "Selections" p. 198.
- (5) See Sasaki, Lin-chi, p. 57; Miura & Sasaki, Zen Dust, p. 231.
- (6) See Miura & Sasaki, Zen Dust, p. 230.
- (7) See Yampolsky, Platform Sutra, p. 133.
- (8) See Miura & Sasaki, Zen Dust, pp.187, 373; Yampolsky, Platform Sutra, pp. 91, 113, 162.
- (9) See Sasaki, Lin-chi, p. 33. Also Shibayama, Mumonkan, p. 60.
- (10) See Hori, Zen Dust, p. 339.
- (11) Shibayama, Mumonkan, p. 58.
- (12) _____, p. 60.
- (13) See App, Yunmen, p. 194.
- (14) McRae, Northern School, p. 78.
- (15) See Miura & Sasaki, Zen Dust, pp. 301-302.
- (16) See Sasaki, Lin-chi, p. 33.
- (17) _____, p. 56.
- (18) _____, p. 62.
- (19) See, for example, Philip Yampolsky, Platform Sutra; John McRae, Northern School; John Jorgensen, "Imperial Lineage"; Bernard Faure, Will to Orthodoxy.
- (20) See William Bodiford, "Dharma Transmission" p. 439.
- (21) Michel Mohr, "Zen Buddhism" p. 363.
- (22) William Bodiford, "Dharma Transmission" p. 451.
- (23) See Jeff Shore, "Koan Zen" pp. 24-25.
- (24) Michel Mohr, "Zen Buddhism" p. 358.
- (25) See Ren Jiyu, "Chan Buddhism" pp. 23-24.
- (26) See Nattier & Prebish, "Buddhist Sectarianism," p. 254 and passim; Charles Prebish, "Buddhist Councils"; Nalinaksha Dutt, "Buddhist Sects."

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