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Emptiness and Dust: Zen Dharma Transmission Rituals

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Although the Shingon lineage of Kukai (774 - 835) and the Tendai lineage of Saicho (767 - 822) can be most readily identified as the Tantric mainstream within Japanese Buddhism, we must not overlook the pervasive influence of Tantric rituals, Tantric deities, and Tantric symbolism on Japanese religious traditions in general. Even today fire invocations (*homa* in Sanskrit, *goma* in Japanese), for example, are ubiquitous not just in Shingon and Tendai, but also in Hosso, Nichiren, and Zen lineages, as well as in Shinto (Japan's so-called "native" religion), mountain asceticism (*shugendo*), and many New Age religions, such as Agonshu. In medieval times, before the eighteenth-century renaissance of Buddhist scholarship gave birth to a heightened sense of sectarian identity among these lineages, Tantric imagery was even more common than it is now. For this reason, scholars of Japanese culture often refer to medieval Japanese religions as *kenmitsu* (combined exoteric and esoteric Tantric) Buddhism.

Prime examples of Tantric tendencies within medieval Zen can be found in the once common practice of secret initiations into the esoteric lore of Zen, and in the documents (*kirikami*) on which the contents of such initiations were recorded. These initiations were reserved for the most advanced disciples, those who would inherit the dharma lineage of their master and thereby become Zen masters in their own right. Conducted in absolute secrecy over a period of several weeks or months, the initiations would reveal to the disciple both special ritual techniques, which the master and disciple would rehearse, as well as the symbolic associations from which the ritual techniques derived their religious power. Over the course of the initiations, the disciple would record on separate single sheets of paper (the original meaning of the term *kirikami*) key terms, signs, and gestures for each ritual. Some of the rituals taught in this way were exactly the same as the ones transmitted in Shingon or Tendai lineages. The most interesting initiation documents for students of Zen, however, are the ones that focus on Zen itself.

Two such documents are translated below. While reading these translations, it is important to remember that these documents have become available to the general public only because modern-day Zen masters no longer maintain the tradition of esoteric initiations that such documents represent. They have also abandoned, therefore, the traditions of hands-on knowledge and oral explanation necessary to understand fully the content of these texts. For this reason, much of the symbolism remains obscure.

The first document, entitled "Emptiness and Dust Ritual" (*Kujinsho*) concerns the ritual of dharma transmission in which the disciple merges his mind and his body with that of his teacher. Its title implies the merging of the universal, timeless truth of emptiness (*sunyata*), or buddhahood, with limited, historical phenomena (the dust of ordinary existence). It explains the mythological origins of the Zen lineage in just such a ritual union and how this same form of union must be reenacted in present-day dharma transmission ceremonies. The mythological origin of Zen, of course, lies in the oft-told story of how one day on Vulture Peak (Grdhrakuta) Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha, preached a sermon not with words but by holding up a flower. Maha Kasyapa was the only one of Sakyamuni's many disciples who grasped the true significance of this wordless teaching, which he expressed by a slight smile. Sakyamuni thereupon selected Maha Kasyapa to inherit his dharma robe and his dharma lineage as the second Zen ancestor. Although this story might seem to suggest that the secret, wordless, mind-to-mind transmission of the true dharma occurred at the moment when Sakyamuni's flower met Maha Kasyapa's smile, in reality, according to our document, the formal conveyance of the dharma did not occur until a secret ceremony later that night.

The *Emptiness and Dust Ritual* document explains how the spiritual union of Sakyamuni and his disciple was symbolized by a wide variety of ritual forms that the contemporary Zen master and his disciple must reenact: flames leap from one torch to the next (symbolized in the document by a two-headed flaming chicken); teacher and disciple reflect one another by covering their faces with mirrors; they mix their blood together, and they use their mixed blood as ink to write their names together; the teacher anoints the disciple, who then anoints the teacher. After each ritual element the teacher and disciple must recite together: "Future generations must never terminate the lineage of the buddha-to-buddha transmission."

The most powerful tangible symbol created during this ritual is a genealogical table known as "blood lineage" chart (*kechimyaku*). Beginning with Sakyamuni, the table lists the names of each generation (both real and imagined) of Zen ancestors down to the present. This list of names constitutes a "blood lineage" (*kechimyaku*) in several senses of the word. First, as mentioned above, the master and disciple physically mix their blood together to produce ink for writing the chart. The spiritual connection between each individual person named provides the life blood that sustains the religious experience of Zen awakening, and the written list of names forms a text that can be used as a magical talisman to confirm

the faith of the present generation in the reality of that awakening. In popular religious lore, a properly written blood lineage chart can exorcise ghosts and free the dead from the torments of hell. The intangible, wordless essence of the Buddha wisdom is symbolized by Vajra Jewel Precepts (*kongo ho fan*) that are transmitted along with the blood lineage chart. For this reason, the *Emptiness and Dust Ritual* document identifies dharma transmission ritual as a special kind of precept ordination ceremony.

The second document, entitled *The Unsurpassed Ultimate Blood Line of the Bodhisattva Precepts in the Orthodox Transmission of the Buddhas and Ancestors* (*Busso shoden bosatsukai kechimiyaku saigoku mujo no koto*), makes explicit the soteriological implications of the first document. It begins by asserting that the blood lineage is the fundamental body of all buddhas and all living beings. The circle surrounding the names of Sakyamuni Buddha and Maha Kasyapa at the head of the lineage chart signifies the true blood lineage, which is none other than the bright "moon disk" of wisdom that "constitutes the fundamental mind of living beings." It goes on to explain that the disciple attains sudden awakening at the moment when he receives the ordination with the Vajra Jewel Precepts. In this awakened state, all dualities, including all distinctions between good and evil, collapse. Every aspect of the precept ordination is charged with soteriological significance. The teacher's bowing to the disciple enacts the descent of the universal (*honji*) into the particular (*suijaku*), whereas the disciple's bowing to the teacher represents the ascent of the particular into the universal. The union of both ascent and descent is achieved as both teacher and disciple leave the initiation site together. A five-colored string is tied around the blood lineage chart because living beings fundamentally are the Five Wisdom Buddhas of the Womb Mandala. The string is tied with nine knots because living beings possess nine types of consciousness, and so forth.

The physical layouts of the original documents are also noteworthy. The *Emptiness and Dust Ritual* document is long and thin, with a circle at the top of the document, followed by text, followed by a list of names, and concluding with more text. The circle at the top of the document contains the names of Sakyamuni Buddha and his disciple Maha Kasyapa. The circle itself is labeled as depicting a small mirror of the type that the teacher and disciple will wear on their heads during the dharma transmission ritual. The list of names in the middle of the document consists of all the Indian, Chinese, and Japanese patriarchs in the Zen genealogy. The dictionary forms of the names of the first ten Japanese Zen masters listed are as follows: Dogen (1200-1253), Ejo (1198-1280), Gikai (1219-1309), Keizan Jokin (1264-1325), Gasan Joseki (1276-1366), Tsugen Jakurei (1322-1391), Tenshin Jisho (d. 1413), Kido Choo (d. 1410), Sesso Ichijun (1377-1455), and Tenno Soin (d. 1467). A red line, written in the blood of the master and disciple, runs from the top circle down the right margin of the text through the list of names and then back up the left margin back to the circle. The *Emptiness and Dust Ritual* document also contains a brief glossary of the esoteric meaning of each word in the phrase "I entrust (*fuzoku*) so-and-so with the Lineage of the Wisdom Eye that Perceives the True Dharma (*shdbogenzo*), the Marvelous Mind

of Nirvana (*shobo genzo nehan myoshin*). "Both documents conclude with fictitious stories that tell how the original copies of the documents were brought to Japan from China by Dogen, the founder of the Soto lineage of Japanese Zen. Finally, both documents are signed and dated by Kyugai Donryo, about whom nothing is known other than the fact that he once served as the abbot of Yokoji Zen monastery.

The *Kujinsho kirikami*, copied in 1637 by Kyugai Donryo is a Yokoji (Ishikawa prefecture) initiation document. It was photographed September 5, 1980 by Kaneda Hiroshi. (Kaneda serial nos. 2-5). The transcription is in Ishikawa Rikizan, "Chusei Sotoshu kirikami no bunrui shiron, 12: shitsunai (shiho, sanmotsu, kechimyaku) kankei o chushin to shite," *Komazawa daigaku Bukkyo gakubu ronshu* 19 (1988): 165-167.

Busso shoden bosatsukai kechimyaku saigoku mujo no koto, copied in 1622 by Kyugai Donryo, seal by Meian Tosai, is also a Yokoji (Ishikawa prefecture) initiation document. It was photographed September 5, 1980 by Kaneda Hiroshi (Kaneda serial nos. 101-2). The transcription is in Ishikawa Rikizan, "Chusei Sotoshu kirikami no bunrui shiron, 14: shitsunai (shiho, sanmotsu, kechimyaku) kankei o chushin to shite," *Komazawa daigaku Bukkyo gakubu ronshu* 20 (1989):

Further Reading

Regarding the roles of secret initiations and precept ordinations in the development of Zen Buddhism in Japan, see William M. Bodiford, *Soto Zen in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), as well as two of his forthcoming articles: "Bodhidharma's Precepts in Japan," and "Documents of Insight: Initiation Documents (*kirikami*) in Japanese Zen." The ways that Zen monastic rituals serve to construct religious authority from dharma lineages is illustrated in Robert H. Sharf, "The Idolization of Enlightenment: On the Mummification of Ch'an Masters in Medieval China," *History of Religions* 32 (1992): 1-31. Although a serviceable overview of the full range of Japanese Tantric Buddhism does not exist, readers will find in Taiko Yamasaki, *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1988) an excellent account of how one contemporary Shingon practitioner views his own tradition. Stanley Weinstein, "The Beginnings of Esoteric Buddhism in Japan: The Neglected Tendai Tradition," *Journal of Asian Studies* 34 (1974): 177-91, points out how Shingon historical scholarship tends to slight the contributions of Saicho. Nonsectarian accounts of specific Tantric rituals can be found in Michel Strickmann, "Homa in East Asia," in Agni: *The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*, edited by Frits Staal (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), vol. 2, pp. 418-55, and in two articles by James Sanford: "The Abominable Tachikawa Skull Ritual," *Monumenta Nipponica* 46 (1991): 1-20, and "Breath of Life: The Esoteric Nenbutsu," in *Esoteric Bud-*

dhism in japan, edited by Ian Astley-Kristensen (Copenhagen and Aarhus: Seminar for Buddhist Studies, 1994), pp. 65-98. The same volume (pp. 37-64) also contains Ian Reader's account of the Agonshu, "Appropriated Images: Esoteric Themes in a Japanese New Religion." Finally, parallels between the Shingon teachings of Kukai and the Zen teachings of Dogen are discussed by David E. Shaner, *The Body-Mind Experience in Japanese Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985).

Emptiness and Dust Ritual

[Written inside a circle:] A bright mirror, 4.2 inches in diameter. The great master Sakyamuni Buddha - Maha Kasyapa - . . . [A line extends down the right margin of the text to the remainder of the lineage chart found below.]

First year of Shoan [1299], senior water year of the horse, fourth moon, fifteenth day; lecture concerning Sakyamuni holding up the flower:

Sakyamuni raised the flower before a huge audience of eighty thousand, including five hundred senior disciples. Although the entire audience turned their heads and looked at the same sight, they did not fathom Sakyamuni's heart. Only Maha Kasyapa smiled. Sakyamuni said: "I have the Lineage of the Wisdom Eye that Perceives the True Dharma, the Marvelous Mind of Nirvana (*nehan myoshin*). I entrust it with Maha Kasyapa. Later tonight I will perform the Buddha-to-Buddha Dharma Transmission Ceremony."

In the middle of the night Maha Kasyapa silently sneaked past the gaze of the audience of eighty thousand, including five hundred senior disciples, and entered Sakyamuni's cave at the base of the Udumbara Tree next to the mountain stream on Vulture Peak. The cave was four bays wide. Sakyamuni sat facing west on the golden-lion throne situated on the east side of the room. Maha Kasyapa sat on the west side, facing east. Because of the darkness outside it was difficult to discern their shared location. Just then a flaming chicken flew into the room. A flaming chicken is a type of bird with two heads and red and white spots in nine places. Flames blaze from between its two heads. In that room it appeared just like the flame of a lamp. Thus, it signifies the location where dharma fires of wisdom erupt.

Sakyamuni turned toward heaven and kowtowed three times. Maha Kasyapa placed his seating mat over Sakyamuni's mat and kowtowed three times. Then they performed the ceremony of the past buddhas and present buddhas. Facing two mirrors toward each other, they performed the kasaya robe ritual, covering their heads with the mirrors. Sakyamuni took the upper mirror and Maha KaSyapa took the lower mirror. Their reflections shifted. Sakyamuni's mirror reflected the image of Maha Kasyapa, while Maha Kasyapa's mirror reflected the image of Sakyamuni. This is the mutual embodiment of buddhas. Having completed the above, next they performed the kasaya robe ritual, raising their

heads. Sakyamuni rubbed Maha Kasyapa's forehead and said: "Just as these two mirrors function together, so too is the Lineage of the Wisdom Eye that Perceives the True Dharma bequeathed. Throughout the infinite future this lineage must never be allowed to terminate." These are the words that are chanted buddha to buddha.

Then the image in one of the mirrors shifted to reflect the name of Sakyamuni. Likewise, Maha Kasyapa's name appeared reflected in the other mirror. They performed the rite of mixing blood from their tongues to form ink and, using a wooden stylus, linked the two names together. The dharma transmission ceremony of past buddha to present buddha is performed thus. Do not allow it to become lost to buddhas of future generations. Buddhas and bodhisattvas have halos of light or purple clouds around their heads because they perform this ceremony.

In the same manner as when the Buddha spent twenty years in Heaven of the Thirty-three Deities (*trayastrimsa*) preaching the Maha Maya Scripture to his mother, the huge audience of eighty thousand addressed the Buddha and asked: "According to the scriptures, this is the dharma of equality. But what about the blind people of the triple world? How can they be saved? Please by your compassion provide them with a means of salvation." In response, the Buddha preached the Ten Vajra Precepts.

The appearing in the mirror, the placing it on one's head, the appearing of Sakyamuni's name, the linking together names of past buddhas and present buddhas, the ink from the blood of the tongue, the sprinkling of sanctified water on one another's heads, the transmitting the flame of the flaming chicken with its spots in nine places, the lighting of the torch: these constitute the dharma transmission ceremony of all buddhas. They are the life root of the buddhas.

The Wayfaring Site [*bodhi-manda*, or site of awakening] of Sakyamuni and Maha Kasyapa became a stupa. It is the appearance of the Transmission Returning Stupa. The bodhisattvas, auditors (s'ravakas), and solitary buddhas (*pratyekabuddhas*) gathered around it like clouds. The king of Magadha and his sixty thousand attendants came to that assembly of equality. The earth and heavens shook with six kinds of earthquakes. The demon of the Sixth Heaven tried to disrupt the Buddha by throwing rocks to smash the stupa. But at that moment many additional stupas began to appear. They were too numerous to count. As soon as rocks were thrown by the demon they appeared as letters and fell from the sky. The many stupas appeared and the letters became attached to their back gates. Within ten years they spread throughout central India. As Master Tendai said, from there to this Vimalakirti-like abbot's quarters [that is, the room in a Zen monastery where the initiation is conducted], thus has the dharma been transmitted. This buddha-to-buddha lineage must never be allowed to terminate.

Later generations must never doubt this *Emptiness and Dust Ritual*. Deviation from this format is the heresy of naturalism (*tennen gedo*, that is, denial of karmic connections). This document was originally written in an Indic script.

After a long time the Indic letters became corrupted. During later generations this document required special study of Sanskrit and the proper procedure began to disappear. During the time of Ejo, the second ancestor of Eihei-ji, this version was drafted. The original text is inscribed on Chinese paper and is stored inside the heart of the sacred image of Dogen, the founder of Eihei-ji. It is never revealed.

("True Dharma" is the ancient mirror. "Lineage of the Wisdom Eye" is the blood from the tongue. "Nirvana," which is complete Parinirvana, is liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The "Marvelous Mind" is the flaming chicken, which is the shining flame of the torches. "Entrust" is shared use.)

[Lineage continued from above:] . . . - Ananda - Sanavasa - Upagupta - Dhrtaka - Miccaka - Vasumitra - Buddhnanandi - Buddhamitra - Parsva - Punyayasas - Asvakhosa - Kapimala - Nagarjuna - Kanadeva - Rahulata - Sanghanandi - Gayasata - Kumaralabdha - Sayanta - Vasubandhu - Manorhita - Haklenayasas - Simha - Basiasita - Punyamitra - Prajnatarā - Bodhidharma - Second Ancestor Huiko - Third Ancestor Sengcan - Fourth Ancestor Daoxin - Fifth Ancestor Hongren - Sixth Ancestor Huineng - Qingyuan Xingsi - Shitou Xiqian - Yaoshan Weiyān - Yunyan Tansheng - Tongshan Liangjie - Yunju Daoying - Tongan Daopi - Daoan Guanzhi - Liangshan Yuan-guan - Taiyang Jingyuan - Tousi Yijing - Furong Daokai - Danxia Sichun - Changlu Qingliao - Tiandong Zongjue - Xuedou Zhijian - Tiandong Rujing - Eihei Dogen - Eihei Ejo - Daijō Gikai - Tokoku Jokin - Sojijoseki - Yotaku Jakurei - Jigen Tenshin - Kido Chō - Sessō Ichijūn - Tenso Soin - Kokoku Genshin - Ekkei Rin'eki - Chikuo Reishu - Dairin Meifu - Sekigan Eikaku - Tenno Ryōin - Daiko Zen'yu - Tsusan-rin - Buddhas and ancestors properly penetrate - *buddha bodhi* - [This line extends up the left margin of the text back through the circle to Sakyamuni.]

Rub the disciple's forehead and say: "This ceremony shall be taught orally in verse. But it must be performed according to the *Emptiness and Dust Ritual*. If the *Emptiness and Dust Ritual* document is not transmitted, it is a heretical lineage."

- First year of the Great Song-dynasty Baoqing Period [1225]; ninth moon, eighteenth day: Rujing, the former abbot of Jingde Zen monastery on Mount Tiantong bequeathed the above document to Dogen in accordance with proper ceremony. The attendant Zuyue offered incense. The guest prefect Zongrui and the attendant Guangping performed obeisance. This Song-dynasty style precept ceremony was propagated during the Baoqing Period.

- Fifth year of the Japanese Shōō Period [1292], eighth moon, thirteenth day: the above document was carefully copied from the original stored in the Myōkōdo Memorial Hall at Eihei-ji monastery.

- Fourteenth year of the Japanese Kan'ei Period [1637], junior fire year of the ox, eighth moon, auspicious day by Kyugai Donryo.

The Unsurpassed Ultimate Blood Lineage
of the Bodhisattva Precepts in the Orthodox Transmission
of the Buddhas and Ancestors

What is the blood lineage? The blood lineages of all previous buddhas and ancestors as well as the blood lineages of all deluded, ignorant living beings fundamentally are not two. They constitute the undifferentiated true body of a single flavor. Because the buddhas and ancestors have awakened, they constitute original awakening like the moon shining bright in a cloudless sky. Because ordinary people are deluded, they experience darkness as if the moonlight is obscured by clouds. When ordinary people of deluded minds receive the bodhisattva precepts all filth and obstructions are eliminated, completely allowing this spiritual luminosity to appear for the first time. For this reason the Brahma Net Scripture states: "Living beings who receive ordination with the precepts enter into the ranks of the buddhas, attaining the same great awakening. Truly they are the Buddha's children." Based on this principle, the person receiving the precepts sits in the Dharma Throne in the Wayfaring Site, and the teacher bestowing the precepts bows to him. This ritual signifies the attainment of the Way, as the fundamental Buddha [the teacher] descends and the manifest trace [the disciple] ascends. Then the disciple bows to the teacher. This ritual signifies the attainment of the Way, as the fundamental ascends and the manifest trace descends. The preceptor bestows and the disciple receives. The teacher hands over the blood lineage chart and the disciple humbly grasps hold. This ritual signifies the attainment of the Way, as the fundamental and the manifest trace together descend. Once the lineage has been bestowed, teacher and disciple leave the Wayfaring Site together. This ritual signifies the attainment of the Way, as the fundamental and the manifest trace together ascend.

The round circle drawn at the head of the blood lineage chart signifies the bright moon disk that constitutes the fundamental mind of living beings. It is called the "blood lineage." Therefore, the blood line that links together the upper and lower names signifies the undifferentiated body of teacher and disciple. A five-colored string is used to tie these two together, because living beings are inherently endowed with the marvelous virtues of the Five Wisdom Buddhas of the Womb Mandala. Ascending without knowledge of this principle, they become stained with the mud of the five defilements (klesas). Because the seed of the Five Wisdom Buddhas is thereby concealed, in ascending they defy the five planets, in descending they defy the five mountains, in between they defy the five constant ethical norms. Day and night, dawn and dusk, they accumulate the karmic conditions of their evil actions. Therefore they

defy the spiritual standards of the three jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sahgha and of the local gods. Nonetheless, by cultivating the courageous vigor of spiritual practice one purifies his six sense organs, and at the moment one receives the Vajra Jewel Precepts of the buddhas and ancestors he suddenly eliminates the five defilements and realizes the fundamentally awakened body of the Five Wisdom Buddhas. Although each of the five colors has a different name, they are neither different nor distinct from the awakened body. This is why a five-colored string is used to tie these together.

Blood-lineage charts are rolled up and bound with nine knots. This indicates that the eighty-four thousand dharanis [spells] and the eighty-four thousand defiled practices, the good and the evil, ultimately are not two. True and false are one and the same. All return to the perfect dharma body of the nine types of consciousness. The nine knots express this.

The Chinese graph for the word "union" (*go*) is used to state the doctrine of all nine types of consciousness being perfectly endowed. When the ways of host and guest achieve union, all insignificant matters, petty humans, and non-sentient things end up in the coal pit. This one Chinese character is composed of three graphic elements: "man," "one," and "mouth." This means that man uses his mouth to eat things to sustain his life. Union with this blood lineage thus sustains the life of the buddhas and ancestors. Buddhas use their one mouth to preach the unsurpassed dharma wheel to save all beings of great and small, real and provisional spiritual capacities. Zen uses the one mouth to pluck out the stakes hammered in by monks. In such ways, is there any affair of day or night, secular or sacred, that is not accomplished with the mouth? Other extensive ways of examining the graph "union" also exist and should be handed down.

This tradition was first transmitted when Dogen, our country's first ancestor, traveled to Song-dynasty China in accordance with the instructions of Eisai, the founder of Kenninji monastery, and entered into the innermost chambers of Master Tiandong Rujing, thereby completing his studies. Wanting to return to our country, Dogen humbly requested leave. Master Rujing replied: "Don't be so hasty. There exists this document called *The Unsurpassed Ultimate Affair of the Buddhas and Ancestors*. It is rare. I have not yet permitted you to learn it. At this time you must keep this a deeply held secret. After you receive it, take it back to Japan and use it to benefit all beings." Dogen obeyed his teacher's command and remained for another month. After he finished receiving it, he returned to this land to save all deluded beings, the good and the evil, the elite and the base.

What is the great affair of the buddhas and ancestors like? You must guard this well. Guard it well. You must keep it secret.

-Copied on a good day, second moon, eighth year of Genwa Period [1622]
by Kyugai Donryo.