

The Transmission
of the Mind
Outside the Teaching

UPĀSAKA LU K'UAN YÜ
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The Second Generation

After The Patriarch Hui Neng:

Ch'an Master Ma Tsu

CH'AN master Ma Tsu, also called Tao I, was a native of Shih Fang in Han Chou district (Szechwan province). His lay surname was Ma and since he had many Dharma successors all over the country he was called Ma Tsu (ancestor Ma).

A monk asked the master, 'How is the Tao practised?'

The master replied, 'Tao is beyond practice. If it is practised and realized, it will decay in the end; this is the way of śrāvakas. If it is not practised, this is the way of worldlings.'

The monk asked, 'What sort of interpretation can reach the Tao?'

The master replied, 'Self-nature is basically complete in us. If one is not hindered by (dualities e.g.) good and evil, one is a practiser of Tao. If one grasps what is good and rejects what is evil, or meditates on the void to enter the state of dhyāna, all this is creativeness (which obstructs the self-nature). Further if (the mind is allowed to) wander outside (in quest of sense data) this is parting with the self-nature to be farther away from it. Just develop a mind beyond the three worlds (of desire, form and beyond form). If a single thought arises it involves the three worlds and becomes the root of birth and death. The absence of (even) a single thought eradicates the root of birth and death and ensures the acquisition of the priceless gem of Dharma-king. From time immemorial because of the worldling's wrong thinking, it unites

with fawning, crookedness, depravation, falsehood, self-importance and arrogance to become one whole. Hence the sūtra says that all dharmas (components) unite to form the (human) body which is created when they arise and is destroyed when they end. When they arise they do not announce their rising and when they end they do not announce their death. All preceding, following and in between thoughts do not wait for one another; when they are still and come to an end, this is the samādhi of the ocean symbol,¹ which includes all things like the great sea which gathers waters from hundreds and thousands of different streams and rivers into a single flavoured liquid called sea water, which is a mixture of waters of different flavours from many streams and rivers. So if a man takes a bath in the sea, he actually bathes in all sorts of water. Hence the śrāvaka awakens to delusion and the worldly man deludes himself by keeping from awakening.

But the śrāvaka ignores the holy mind which fundamentally is above and beyond position, cause and effect, rank and class, and because of his wrong thinking he sows causes and reaps effects thereby dwelling in the void for 80 000 and 20 000 aeons.² Thus although they seem to be awakened they are really deluded. All Bodhisattvas consider such an incomplete realization to be like a hell for it causes trouble by sinking into (relative) voidness which hinders the perception of Buddha-nature.

As to a man of superior root (spirituality) if he suddenly meets a man of good counsel (kalyāṇamitra) who gives the correct instruction, he will readily understand it and will

1. Ocean symbol: the vastness of the meditation of the Buddha, the vision of all things.

2. Both 80,000 and 20,000 stand for the realm of space and time, 8 for ālaya or the eighth consciousness, 2 for dualities and 0000 for time. This is called the subtle duality of ego and Dharma (relative Nirvāṇa) after all coarse dualities have been wiped out. Cf *Ch'an and Zen Teaching, first series*, 3rd part, *The Diamond Cutter of Doubts*. (Rider, London; Shambala, Berkeley).

without passing through successive stages, instantly realize his fundamental nature.

Hence the sūtra says, 'Worldly men are reversible but śrāvakas are not.'³ Delusion is mentioned to reveal enlightenment but since fundamentally there is no delusion, enlightenment is not formulated. For countless aeons all living beings have never been out of Dharma-samādhi (the immutable underlying nature of all things) and have always been taking meals wearing clothing, talking, chatting and using their six sense organs in their daily activities while remaining in that Dharma-samādhi. For their inability to return to the source (i.e. the fundamental nature) they are called seekers of forms and are deceived by their passions thereby creating all sorts of karma. If, in the time of a thought, one of them can turn this thought inward the whole body of his holy mind will manifest.

You all should strive to realize your minds but do not memorize my words, for if you can speak of countless dogmas as many as there are sand grains in the Ganges, your minds will not increase, and if you are unable to speak of them, your minds will not decrease. If you can speak of them those minds are yours, and if you cannot they are equally yours. Even if you can reproduce your bodies *ad infinitum*, emit bright lights and create the eighteen transformations, it is far better for you to give me back my ashes.⁴

3. Cf *The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*, Chapter VIII, The Buddha path: Mahākāśyapa said, 'The śrāvaka who has cut off all bonds (of transmigration) is no longer interested in the Buddha path. Therefore, the worldly man still reacts favourably to the Buddha path whereas the śrāvaka does not.' (Shambala, Berkeley, USA)

4. When a śrāvaka is about to realize relative nirvāṇa, he can create transformation bodies which radiate and illuminate his surroundings and use his supernatural powers to perform eighteen kinds of transmutation. He aims at eradicating all troubles in the three worlds (of desire, of form and beyond form) by entering the flame samādhi which destroys body and mind to realize relative nirvāṇa.

For he who covers himself with ashes⁵ is powerless like the śrāvakas who wrongly sow seeds (cause) to reap fruits (effect, that is to be held in bondage by the idea of cause and effect).

Those who are not covered with ashes are really strong like the Bodhisattvas whose Tao karma is ripe and who are immune from contamination by evils.

If you say the Tathāgata's expedient teaching in the Tripiṭaka cannot be fully expounded in countless aeons as many as sand grains in the Ganges river, this is like an endless chain which cannot be discontinued.

But if you awaken to the holy mind there will no longer be anything of real concern for you. You have stood for so long (in this hall); (go away and) take good care of yourselves.⁶

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One day in the Ch'an hall upasaka P'ang Yun⁷ asked the master, 'Who is the man who does not take all things as his companions?'

The master replied, 'I will tell you this after you have swallowed all the water in the West River.'

P'ang Yun said, 'Please raise your eyes to look at one who is not blind to his essential body.'

The master looked down and P'ang Yun exclaimed, 'This is a stringless lute which you alone can play so well.'

The text means that it is useless to burn the body to ashes for this can achieve only relative or incomplete nirvāṇa which is still far away from absolute nirvāṇa.

5. This refers to Indian ascetics who cover themselves with ashes, or burn their flesh.

6. These are concluding words at the end of a Ch'an meeting, which mean, 'Take good care of your mind'.

7. P'ang Yun: an enlightened Buddhist of the 7th century. Cf *Ch'an and Zen Teaching, First Series*, pages 74-78. (Rider, London; Shambala, Berkeley).

The master then looked up and P'ang Yun prostrated himself to pay his obeisance to him. Thereat the master returned to the abbot's room.

P'ang Yun said afterwards, 'I just tried to show cleverness which turned out to be stupidity.'⁸

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One day a monk asked Ma Tsu, 'What is Buddha?'

Ma Tsu replied, 'Mind is Buddha.'

The monk asked, 'Putting aside the four terms of differentiation and the hundred negating terms, will you please point directly to the purpose of the coming from the West.'⁹

Ma Tsu said, 'Today I am not in the mood (to talk); go to the guest house¹⁰ and ask Chih Ts'ang who will tell you.'

8. The above dialogue is very interesting for students of the Transmission of Mind. In order to trap Ma Tsu, P'ang Yun asked him to look up at an enlightened man.

In reply Ma Tsu looked down to reveal the functioning of the enlightened mind. P'ang Yun then praised the master for playing so well on a stringless flute. Thereat Ma Tsu looked up to return functioning to the enlightened mind.

In the second volume of our Ch'an and Zen Teaching series, we have explained the substance (t'i) and function (yung) of an enlightened mind. In Ch'an parlance *looking down* is 'function' which means the mind wandering outside to deliver living beings, and *looking up* is returning function to 'substance' (the mind) after the work of salvation has been done.

P'ang Yun's act of prostrating is 'function' and Ma Tsu's return to the abbot's room means returning function to 'substance' to end the dialogue, for nothing further can be added to reveal substance and function.

9. The four terms of differentiation, i.e. of all things into the existing, non-existing, both and neither. The hundred negative words used in the usual statement that the one mind is neither this nor that, neither long nor short, neither white nor yellow, neither within nor without, etc.

The questioner asked the master not to use the usual four terms of differentiation and hundred negative words in his reply but to point direct to the object of Bodhidharma's coming to China from India.

10. Hsi t'ang or western hall, the living quarters for guest monks from

The monk went to the guest house and asked Chih Ts'ang the same question. In reply Chih Ts'ang pointed his forefinger to his head, saying, 'I have a bad headache today and cannot tell you; go and ask brother Hai.'¹¹

The monk went to Huai Hai who said, 'Coming to this I really do not understand.'

The monk then returned to report all this to Ma Tsu who said, 'Ts'ang's head is white, Hai's head is black.'¹²

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Ma Tsu was gathering rattan canes outside when he saw Shui Liao.¹³ Ma Tsu gesticulated as if to sweep away the

other monasteries in contrast to tung t'ang or eastern hall, the living quarters for the monks of the community.

11. Brother Hai was Ch'an master Huai Hai, also called Pai Chang.

12. The transmission of Mind handed down by Bodhidharma after his arrival in China is outside the teaching and cannot be explained in words for it deals with the immaterial mind which is indescribable and inexpressible. To explain it in words implies a duality of subject and object and defeats the very purpose of the Transmission.

Ma Tsu instead of describing in words the immaterial mind as formulated by Bodhidharma, said he was not in the mood to talk thus revealing his own mind whose function consisted of uttering these words. In addition, Ma Tsu urged the questioner to call on Chih Ts'ang who would also reveal his own mind in reply to the question.

Chih Ts'ang said he had a headache and would not say anything thus revealing his own mind whose function was to speak these words. Chih Ts'ang urged the questioner to call on Huai Hai (Pai Chang) who would also reveal his own mind in his own way.

Huai Hai said he really did not understand the subject to reveal his own mind whose function was to utter these words.

The monk was stupid and, instead of looking into the three meaningful replies, returned to report them to Ma Tsu who again taught him not to discriminate between Chih Ts'ang and Huai Hai because the mind is neither black nor white and should be looked into to be clear about it for the perception of self-nature and attainment of Buddhahood as taught by Bodhidharma.

13. Shui Liao was a Ch'an master at the time of Ma Tsu. The two words 'Shui liao' also mean a small dirty pool of rain-water on a road.

water of a puddle (that obstructed the road) and Shui Liao approached as if to receive the water. With his (right) foot Ma Tsu kicked down Shui Liao who got up to give a loud roar of laughter, saying, 'Countless profound meanings and hundreds and thousands of (states of) samādhi are at the end of a hair; strive to realize their source.'

*

(One day) Ma Tsu ordered a monk to deliver to Master Tao Ch'in at Ching Shan a letter in which he had drawn a circle. Tao Ch'in opened the letter, saw the circle and sent for a pen to add a dot in the middle of the circle.

Later a monk related the story to state-master Hui Chung at Nan Yang who said, 'Master Tao Ch'in was fooled by master Ma Tsu.'

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One day a monk asked Ma Tsu, 'Why do you say that mind is Buddha?'

Ma Tsu replied, 'To stop a child from crying.'

The monk asked, 'And after the child has stopped crying?'

Ma Tsu replied, 'Neither mind nor Buddha.'

The monk asked, 'If some one who does not belong to these two classes, comes, what will you teach him?'

Ma Tsu replied, 'I will tell him that it is not a thing.'

The monk asked, 'If a man of the right calibre comes, what will you say?'

Ma Tsu replied, 'I will merely tell him to experience the great Tao.'

*

A visitor asked Ma Tsu, 'What was the idea of the coming from the West?'

Ma Tsu asked back, 'What idea is it at this very moment?'

*

Ma Tsu asked a monk, 'Where do you come from?'

The monk replied, 'From Hu Nan (province).'

Ma Tsu asked, 'Is the East lake full of water?'

The monk replied, 'Not yet.'

Ma Tsu said, 'It has been raining for a long time; why is the lake still not full?'¹⁴

Later, when they heard of the (above) dialogue, master Tao Wu commented, 'Already full'; master Yun Yen said, 'Very deep indeed'; and master Tung Shan asked, 'In which kalpa (aeon) did it decrease?'¹⁵

The same monk again asked Ma Tsu, 'What is the reason why water which has neither tendons nor bones can carry a ten-thousand-hu boat?'¹⁶

Ma Tsu asked back, 'Here there is neither water nor boat; why do you speak of tendons and bones?'

*

One evening Chih Ts'ang, Pai Chang and Nan Chuan¹⁷ were accompanying Ma Tsu outside to enjoy the moonlight when Ma Tsu asked them, 'What should we do at this very moment?'

14. Water which can change into ice, sleet, fog, mist, vapour, steam, etc. symbolizes the mind which is also subject to transformation through the six worlds of existence. But despite these transformations, our fundamental nature remains the same for it is changeless.

Ma Tsu wanted to enlighten the visiting monk who, however, was stupid and did not understand the master's good intention. Ma Tsu spoke of the rains that had fallen for a long time, which meant the preaching of the Dharma all over the country; and asked why the monk had not realized his self-nature after hearing the Dharma so frequently.

15. The three masters mean the same thing, that is the self-nature is changeless and therefore is 'already full', is 'always very profound' and 'never decreases in volume'.

16. Hu: a corn measure nominally holding ten pecks but generally holding about five.

17. Three disciples of Ma Tsu who were all enlightened.

Chih Ts'ang (lit. Knowledge-piṭaka or Store of Knowledge) said, 'It is best to (pay reverence and) make offerings to Buddhas.'

Pai Chang (also called Huai Hai, lit. Ocean in the Bosom) said, 'It is best to practise (the Dharma).'

Nan Chuan shook the long sleeve of his robe and went away.¹⁸

Ma Tsu then declared, 'Sūtras are returnable to the piṭaka and dhyāna to the (vast) ocean but P'u Yuan (another name of Nan Chuan) alone leaps over and beyond all things.'¹⁹

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(One day) Ma Tsu asked Pai Chang, 'What Dharma do you teach to others?'

Pai Chang held up a dust-whisk (vertically).

Ma Tsu asked, 'Only this, nothing else?'

Pai Chang threw down the dust-whisk.²⁰

*

(One day) a monk asked Ma Tsu, 'What should one do to agree with the Tao?'

Ma Tsu replied, 'I already do not agree with the Tao.'²¹

18. Nan Chuan shook the long sleeve of his robe as a mark of disapproval.

19. Ma Tsu means that Chih Ts'ang still clings to the idea of offerings to the Buddhas as taught in the sūtras and that Pai Chang clings to the practice of meditation the vastness of which is comparable to an ocean. In other words both still cling to names and forms, whereas Nan Chuan wipes out all traces of offering and practice to leap over to the absolute state of enlightenment. Moreover, Nan Chuan's movements agree with the ch'an tradition which consists of showing the function of the mind by shaking the sleeve of his robe and of returning function to substance by going away to retire from the scene.

20. Raising the dust-whisk reveals the mind's function and throwing it down is to return function to the mind's substance.

21. Because if Ma Tsu agrees with the Tao, he will create the duality of subjective self and objective Tao which hinders his realization of enlightenment.

The monk asked, 'What is the idea of the coming from the West?'

Ma Tsu struck the monk (with his staff) and said, 'If I do not beat you, people from all quarters will laugh at me.'

*

(One day) a young errant monk called Tan Yuan returned to the monastery and drew a circle on the ground in front of Ma Tsu, stepped in the circle to prostrate himself before the master and then stood up.

Ma Tsu asked the young monk, 'Do you want to be a Buddha?'

Tan Yuan replied, 'I do not know how to rub the eyes (to see strange things).'

Ma Tsu said, 'I am not as good as you are.'

The monk did not reply.²²

*

One day a sutra-expounding monk came and asked Ma Tsu, 'What Dharma does the Ch'an sect teach?'

Ma Tsu asked back, 'What Dharma does the Venerable Sir teach?'

The monk replied, 'I have taught sūtras and śāstras at over twenty meetings.'

Ma Tsu asked, 'Are not you a lion then?'²³

The monk replied, 'I dare not (claim to be)'²⁴

Thereat Ma Tsu uttered: 'Hsu, hsu!'

The monk said, 'This is Dharma.'

Ma Tsu asked, 'What Dharma?'

22. The young monk did not reply because he was still inexperienced and did not know how to conclude the dialogue. For instance, he should pay reverence first to reveal his mind's function and then go away to return function of substance. Tan Yuan later became an enlightened Ch'an master.

23. Lion: The Buddha is likened to a lion, in respect of his fearlessness.

24. A very polite term in Chinese, showing the speaker's modesty.

The monk replied, 'The lion coming out of the cave.'

Ma Tsu kept silent and the monk said, 'This also is Dharma.'

Ma Tsu asked, 'What Dharma?'

The monk replied, 'The lion in the cave.'

Ma Tsu asked, 'What is that which neither goes out nor comes in?'²⁵

The monk could not reply.

(Later when Pai Chang heard of the dialogue, he commented, 'Do you see it?')²⁶

The monk took leave of Ma Tsu and went away. Ma Tsu called him, 'Venerable Sir!' The monk turned his head and Ma Tsu asked, 'What is it?' The monk did not know what to reply and Ma Tsu said, 'What a stupid monk!'²⁷

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(One day) the provincial judge at Hung Chou asked Ma Tsu, 'Is it right or wrong to eat meat and drink wine?'

Ma Tsu replied, 'Eating meat and drinking wine is your allotment of enjoyment; to abstain from both is your lot of blessedness.'

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Ma Tsu had 139 chief disciples²⁸ each of them heading a group of devotees in a (different) locality to spread the Mind Dharma all over the country.

On the fifteenth day of the first month of the fourth year of Chen Yuan's (26 February 788) Ma Tsu climbed Shih Men mountain at Chien Ch'ang. While passing through a

25. The Buddha-nature neither comes nor goes.

26. Pai Chang means that the Buddha-nature is immaterial and invisible, but can only be experienced by intuition.

27. Ma Tsu wanted to teach the monk to awaken to that which turned the head but the monk was too stupid to understand the subtlety of mind transmission.

28. Disciples who are allowed to enter the abbot's room for special meetings.

grove he saw a level ditch in a cave and said to his attendant, 'My (old and) worthless body will be buried here next month.' After saying this he and the attendant returned to the monastery.

Some time later Ma Tsu seemed to be indisposed and when the director of the monastery asked him about his health, he said, 'Every day I face the Buddha; every month I face the Buddha.'

On the first day of the second month, Ma Tsu took a bath and passed away while sitting in meditation.

In the reign of Yuan Ho, the emperor conferred upon the master the posthumous title of Ch'an master Ta Chi (Great Serenity) and upon his stūpa the epithet Ta Chuang Yen (Great Majesty).