

23.744 Chan Master Wuzhou Mingzhao Deqian 婺州明招德謙禪師

from Taisho 51. 2076 景德傳燈錄,

Records of the Transmission of the Lamp up to the *Jingde* reign period (1004-7 CE)

Translated by Randolph S. Whitfield

Chan master Deqian of Mount Mingzhao in Wuzhou (Zhejiang, Jinhua), after receiving the seal of approval from Ven. Luoshan [Daoxian], went on an extensive pilgrimage and quickly displayed comprehension of the subtle purport. All the old monks were in awe of his adroitness and there were very few, later, who could parry the point of his barbs.

The master was in the grand hall of the Zhaoqing Temple in Quanzhou (Fujian) and, pointing to a wall painting, asked a monk, ‘Which spiritual entity is this?’

‘It is the virtuous spirit that guards the dharma,’ answered the monk.

‘When the detritus has been washed out, where does it go to?’

The monk had no reply. The master then had a monk go and ask head monk Yan, who replied to the monk, ‘In which kalpa did you come across this difficulty?’

The monk returned to the master and related the reply. The master said, ‘Even if head monk Yan has a thousand people in his assembly later, of what use would it be?’ The monk bowed in deference and asked for a further explanation. ‘Where did it go to?’ asked the master.

Qing Baluo brought up Ven. Yangshan’s (11.221) thrusting his hoe into the ground¹ and asked the master, ‘Was that ancient’s meaning a polite acknowledgement or was the meaning of thrusting the hoe into the ground something else?’

‘Head monk Qing!’ answered the master.

‘Yes.’

‘Could it have been that Yangshan was seen in a dream?’

‘It is not necessary to belittle the words; it is only necessary to discuss the matter with the head monk,’ replied head monk Qing.

‘If it is necessary to discuss such, then collect yourself one thousand five hundred men and act as the old master at the head of the hall,’ said the master.

The master arrived at Shuangyan’s. Elder Shuangyan looked at the master’s demeanour and said, ‘This fellow has a question to present to the śramaṇa: if it is answered then the temple will go to him, but if he is incapable of answering, then the temple will not be handed over. In

¹ 11.221[Ling]You suddenly asked the master, ‘Where have you come from?’

‘From the fields’ replied the master.

‘Were there many people in the fields?’ asked [Ling]You.

The master thrust his hoe into the ground and stood there.

‘Today at the southern mountain the people cutting grass were many’ said You.

The master took up his hoe and left.

the *Diamond Sutra* it is said, “All the Buddhas and all the Buddha dharma come forth from this *sutra*.” Now, say, who is talking in this *sutra*?”

The master replied, ‘Talking and not talking, it is all one-sided. Is this just like the venerable sir deciding to name this particular *sutra*?’ The Elder was silent.

The master then took up the subject of the *sutra*, saying, ‘All of the venerable sages used the dharma of *wuwei*, whilst still being able to distinguish clearly. If this rule is taken as the supreme of the dharma of *wuwei*, then what is there to depend on in making distinctions? Moreover, in making such distinctions, what is right, what is not right? If it is not right, then all the virtuous sages are utterly wrong: if it is right, why the distinction of naming one particular *sutra*?’

Shuangyan was again silent.

‘That is how Xuefeng said it,’ commented the master.

When the master was head monk at Zhizhe Temple in Wuzhou (Zhejiang, Jinhua), he never accepted clean water. The monk in charge of administration asked him, ‘Why pay no attention to clean water or refuse to accept it?’

The master picked up a clean pitcher from under the Chan seat and said, ‘Is this clean?’

The administration monk had no reply. The master then smashed the clean pitcher. From this time on the master’s prestige spread far and wide. The assembly invited him to occupy Mingzhao Temple, in order to begin propagating the dharma there. Chan students came from all directions, the hall filled to capacity.

The master addressed the assembly, saying, ‘Hoping to meet someone, but not able to descend the embankment, even walking quickly it would be difficult to meet. Yet there is the same life, the same death, shared, so what could impede the unfolding?’

A monk asked, ‘What is the situation before the lion has emerged from its den?’

‘Even a fast-flying sparrow-hawk cannot keep up,’ said the master.

‘And after emerging from it?’

‘For ten thousand *li*, everything in disorder.’

‘And when it intends to emerge out of its den, but has not done so yet?’ asked the monk.

‘Dangerous.’

‘So what is the high task?’

‘Wink,’ said the master.

Question: ‘What is the one phrase that penetrates beyond the dharma body?’

‘After the Northern Dipper, turn the body around,’ said the master.²

Question: ‘How to proceed during the twelve periods of the day?’

² Bei Dou 北斗, the Northern dipper, is Ursa Major; Nan Dou, 南斗, the Southern Dipper, is in the constellation of Sagittarius. Bei Dou is longevity, Nan Dou, wealth.

‘Cast the indestructible *Vajra* thunderbolt to the ground,’ said the master.

Question: ‘What were Manjuśrī and Vimalakīrti discussing?’

‘The head wear had already gone to the other side,’ said the master.

Question: ‘What is the venerable sir’s house style?’

‘To get a bite in, is to become a skilful hand,’ answered the master.

Question: ‘Which man could obtain fire without smoke?’

‘Someone who does not begrudge his eyebrows,’ replied the master.

‘Does the venerable sir still have them?’

‘Are you saying that I still have traces of the eyebrows?’ asked the master.

The master saw a freshly arrived monk going to the hall, so he raised his fly-whisk and then cast it down. The monk, deeply impressed, went out. ‘An expert!’ said the master.

Question: ‘When the whole body is decked out to wear the [precious] sword, what then?’

‘When suddenly encountering such a one, what to do?’ asked the master.

The monk had no reply.

The master asked Ven. Guotai (21.596), ‘An ancient said that Juzhi (11.251 Jap. *Gutei*) only recited the dharāṇi of the three karmic activities,³ by which he could surpass the states of all men. This being so, what would have happened if he had chanted this dharāṇi with others – would he still have surpassed all men?’

Guotai pointed a finger straight up (see 11.251⁴), and the master said, ‘Since it was not brought about today, how is it possible to know of the guest from Guazhou (Jiangsu, Yangzhou)?’⁵

The master had an uncle who worked in the government, who fell seriously ill. He had a letter delivered to the master saying, ‘This fellow has such a serious illness, that it is just all pain and no peace. Is there nevertheless someone who could help?’

The master then replied with a letter: ‘This diamond arrow lodged in the top of your head, let it pass through to the other side.’

There was a monk who had taken part in the master’s dharma training. On his departure, he became the incumbent of a hermitage and after one year returned to pay his respects to the

³ Acting according to situation, to consciousness and to Thusness (Charles Müller, DDB)

⁴ Master Juzhi would merely raise one finger and not give any other indications. The master had a young attendant who, when being asked by visitors what the essentials of the master’s teachings were, would just raise a finger. This eventually came to the attention of the master, who then took a knife - and cut off the young attendant’s finger. Screaming in pain, the young attendant made to leave, but the master called him back. When the attendant turned his head, the master raised his finger, whereupon the attendant was immediately liberated. See also Zhuangzi, chapter 2.

⁵ Obscure.

master, saying, ‘An ancient said that after not seeing one another for three days, it is not necessary to use the old protocol.’

The master then exposed his chest and said, ‘Now you tell me, how many hairs are covering this chest?’

The monk had no reply, so the master asked, ‘When are you leaving for the hermitage?’

‘This morning,’ answered the monk.

‘After you have returned, who is going to pay for the broken legs of the cooking pot?’ asked the master.

Again the monk had no reply. The master shouted at him to get out.

Question: ‘Chan master Cheng[meng] had said: ‘I live on the summit of Mount Mingzhao and prosper in transmitting the heart of the ancient Buddhas. What is the summit of Mount Mingzhao?’

‘Replace the eyes,’ said the master.

‘What about the heart of the ancient Buddhas?’

‘Are you still short of breath?’ answered the master.

Question: ‘Before a student can harness the wind and step on water, may the master please indicate what is essential.’

‘Smash the crown of the head,’ said the master.

‘It would be necessary to become an immortal then,’ said the monk.

The master drove him out with a stick.

The master also had a gatha for the assembly, which read,

People in harmony with the single pulse
Are few on Mount Mingzhao
This is the genuine vehicle’s peerless action
Sparks flash suddenly, gone where?
The morning-born phoenix unites with wisdom

The master lived on Mount Mingzhao for forty years and his words circulated in all directions. About to enter change, the master ascended the hall to announce his last instructions. During that night, stretching his legs out, the master asked the attendant, ‘In days of old, when Tathāgata Shakyamuni stretched his legs out (about to enter *parinirvāṇa*), hundreds of bright jewel rays were emitted. Now, tell me, how many are being emitted right now?’

The attendant answered, ‘In ancient days, a forest of cranes,⁶ today, the venerable sir.’

The master, stroking his eyebrows, said, ‘Is this not a betrayal?’ Then he recited another gatha,

⁶ At the passing of Tathāgata Shakyamuni into *parinirvāṇa* between the twin Sala trees, the leaves turned as white as the feathers of the crane.

From a forest of knives, suddenly
Naked power emerges
You all should undertake to guard it well
In the middle of the fire
A calf is born of an iron ox
Coming to the forked road
Who could take on my functions?

Having finished the gatha, the master entered the peace of quiescence. The stupa is still in place.