

Revealing the family shame

The tradition of Zen transmission

Opening talk at the transmission ceremony by Richard Shrobe, JDPSN

In the Zen records there are a number of cases that give us an example of dharma transmission. The first is the root transmission coming from Shakyamuni Buddha to Mahakasyapa. One day on Vulture's Peak, Buddha was going to give a dharma speech and the whole assembly was there. He mounted the rostrum and sat silently for several minutes. Everyone waited, expectantly. What will the Buddha talk about today? Finally, he held up a flower. No one understood except Mahakasyapa, who smiled. And Buddha said, "I have the all pervading true dharma, incomparable nirvana, exquisite teaching of formless form. This I give to Mahakasyapa."

Zen Master Mu Mun writes a poem about the case and comments: "Holding up the flower, tail already appears." "A tail already appears" is like an animal with something trailing behind. Like a turtle who crawls up on the beach, digs a hole, plants its eggs—and as it walks back to the sea, inadvertently leaves traces of where it has been.

The second example of transmission is from Mahakasyapa to Ananda. Ananda was Buddha's cousin and had spent many years studying under him, but never got enlightenment and thus never got transmission from him. After Buddha's death, he studied with Mahakasyapa. One day he asked Mahakasyapa, "Besides the brocade robe the Buddha gave to you, what else did he give?" Mahakasyapa immediately called out, "Ananda!" And Ananda, without thinking, said "Yes, sir!" Then Mahakasyapa said, "Cut down the flag pole in front of the gate." At that time in India, when a dharma talk was given they would raise up a pennant, and at the end of the speech take it down. So "cut down the flag pole" means it is already complete now.

Again, Zen Master Mu Mun has a comment: "Older brother calls, younger brother answers, the family shame appears." Sometimes it takes a lot of courage to reveal the family shame. "Family shame" is an example of a Chinese form of paradoxical humor, and refers to the Zen transmission lineage. So we have to appreciate Zen Master Seung Sahn's courage and wideness of vision, in again revealing the "family shame."

One more example of transmission: When Zen Master Lin Chi was about to die he called an assembly and said, "Soon I will enter into nirvana, please take care of my dharma. Do not let it die out." San Sheng, one of the senior monks, stepped forward and said, "Master, how could you ever imagine that we would let your dharma die

out?" Lin Chi responded, "If someone in the future should ask you about it, what will you say?" San Sheng immediately shouted "KATZ!" Then Lin Chi said, "Who would have dreamed that the future transmission of my dharma is dependent on this blind donkey?"

So we have three examples of dharma transmission: tail appears, family shame appears, and a blind donkey. That is the *what* of dharma transmission; now to the *why*.

One day when Lin Chi was still in Huang Po's monastery, the two of them were together planting pine trees. Huang Po said to Lin Chi, "What is the use of planting so many pine trees here, deep in the mountains?" Of course, deep in the forest, there are already many trees of all kinds growing naturally. So this is like saying, "If everything already has Buddha nature, or original enlightenment, why make something special like transmission and a teaching lineage?"

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Lin Chi responded, "Firstly, it will improve the scenery of the temple; secondly, for future generations it will act as a guide, a record, and a standard." Having said that, he took his hoe and banged it into the ground three times—whack! whack! whack!—and said "Phew!" Huang Po saw this and said, "Our school will flourish greatly with you."

All of us who have visited mountain temples know the scenery is sometimes very inspiring, and so encourages us to practice and find that wide open mind. Scenery is not just nature scenery, but also the people we come in contact with who inspire us to practice and who act as a support and encouragement in our efforts. For those of us who have known Ji Do Poep Sa Nims Mu Deung Sunim, George Bowman and Barbara Rhodes for many years now, it is clear that they have served this function for us already.

Surely, we can say with Zen Master Lin Chi, that these three have been a guide, a record, a standard and an inspiration, and will continue to be so in the future. This is a very wonderful day. Thank you very much. □