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To Transmit Dogen Zenji's Dharma

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Introduction

It is my pleasure to address the distinguished guests who have gathered today at Stanford University to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the birth of Dogen Zenji. In my talk today, I will discuss the topic of "Dharma transmission," first by reflecting on Dogen Zenji's interpretation of the idea. Second, I will examine the so-called "lineage-restoration" movement (*shuto fukko*) of the early modern period which had the issue of Dharma transmission at its core. And finally, I will conclude with a reflection on the significance of receiving and transmitting the Dharma today.

I. Dogen Zenji's Dharma Transmission and Buddha Dharma

While practicing in the assembly of Musai Ryoha at Tendozan Monastery right after he went to China at the age of 24, Dogen initially had an interest in the genealogy document (*shisho*), a certificate authenticating the transmission of the Dharma. Dogen was clearly moved when he actually had opportunities to see "transmission documents" (*shisho*) and wrote about it in the "*Shisho*" chapter of his *Shobogenzo*. In this chapter, he recorded a total of five occasions when he was able to look at a "transmission document" including that of Musai Ryoha.

Let us look at these five occasions in historical sequence:

1] The fall of 1223 when he traveled to China, he was introduced to Den (a monk who was in charge of the temple library), a Dharma descendent of Butsugen Sei'on of the Rinzai Yogi lineage. He was allowed to look at the transmission document of Den which included the names of the seven ancient Buddhas followed by the names of 45 masters up to Rinzai Gigen. The names of masters following Rinzai were written with their monograms within a large circle. The final name was the person handing over the transmission document. To have seen the names of the seven ancient Buddhas and the monks that followed in their footsteps being written down in this way had a big impact on Dogen.(1)

2] In the winter of 1223, he was able to look at the Unmon lineage transmission document of the senior monk Shugetsu, who had become the new head monk of the monastery. With this transmission document, all the names of the Buddhas and the ancestors were listed in order, but this time with Shugetsu's name written in. For Dogen,

this emphasis on receiving the Dharma from those who had walked the Buddhist path in the past, very much impressed him.

3] In 1224, he was able to look at the transmission document of Musai Ryoha, a master in the Rinza Dai'e lineage. Dogen had learned of the existence of this document soon after his enrollment at Tendozan when he was informed by Shiko (the general director of the monastery) of Musai's transmission from Bussho Tokko. Expressing his fervent wish to see the transmission document, the monk Chiko made an arrangement for Dogen to view the document in the Ryonenryo room. This transmission document was originally given by Dai'e Soko to Settan Tokko who in turn gave it to Musai Ryoha. The cover was made with a red brocade with a white silk lining accompanied by a scroll piece of about 30 cm (11 inch) times 2.3 meters (7 feet). Dogen thought to himself that he was able to have this amazing opportunity because of the guidance of the Buddhas and ancestors. Therefore he first offered incense and prostrations before opening up this priceless article.(2) Musai Ryoha, who showed him the document, told him that being able to see the document was a rare opportunity and that the document represented a point of stability that underlies the Buddhist path. (3)

4] Once Dogen left Tendozan, he went on a pilgrimage to many different temples in China. At Mannenji Temple in Heiden, he was able to examine the transmission document of Genshi (who was in the lineage of Daibai Hojo, who had in turn been given transmission by the well-known Baso Doitsu). Genshi, who rarely allowed people to see his transmission document, showed it to Dogen because he had a dream in which the Zen Master Hojo (of Mt. Daibai) appeared with a sprig of plum blossoms and told him to give it to a true seeker of the Way who had crossed the seas. Because of this, when Dogen appeared in front of Genshi only five days after the dream, Genshi showed him the document and told Dogen, "If you wish, I will transmit the Dharma to you." Dogen was overcome with emotions, tears soaking his sleeves, upon hearing these words which the Buddhas and ancestors made available to him with their unseen assistance. Later, when Dogen visited Goshoji (at Mt. Daibai), he had the same dream being offered the sprig of plum blossoms from Zen Master Hojo. This incident was something he kept to himself even when he returned to Japan, writing about it only in the *Shobogenzo* reflecting on the deep karmic conditions that allowed him to see this transmission document.

5] Finishing his pilgrimage and returning to Tendozan to study under Nyojo, Iitsu Seido showed Dogen a transmission document of the Hogen lineage. This document had the words, "The First Ancestor Makakasho was awakened with Shakyamuni Buddha. Shakyamuni Buddha was awakened with Kasho Buddha." Dogen was particularly moved by these words, writing, "Upon seeing this, I was firmly convinced that there is a Dharma transmission between a correct teacher and a correct heir. That was a teaching I had never seen before. At that moment the Buddha ancestors had inconceivably responded to my wish and helped me, a descendent of theirs. I had never been moved so much."(4)

If we take the above examples together, the existence of transmission documents was extremely significant to Dogen during this initial period of training because he believed that they authenticated Dharma transmission. Although he would eventually receive

transmission from his true teacher, Nyojo, the fact that he was able to examine transmission documents on five separate occasions before that time, made Dogen very conscious of his own transmission and transmission document. At the end of the "*Shisho*" chapter, Dogen concludes with Nyojo's words, "We understand that Shakyamuni Buddha inherited the Dharma from Kasho Buddha, and Kasho Buddha inherited the Dharma from Shakyamuni Buddha. When you understand this way, it is the true Dharma transmission of all Buddhas and ancestors."(5) Dogen reflected on these words by confessing, "Then, for the first time, I not only accepted that there is Dharma transmission of Buddha ancestors, but I was able to get out of the old pit I had been in up to that time."(6) The meaning of this lies in Dogen's initial words on transmission documents at the start of the chapter:

A Buddha inherits the Dharma only from a Buddha, an ancestor inherits the Dharma from an ancestor--merging of realization, direct transmission. In this way, it is the unsurpassable awakening. It is impossible to give the seal of verification without being a Buddha, and it is impossible to become a Buddha without receiving the seal of verification from a Buddha. Who else, other than a Buddha, can seal this verification as the most venerable, the most unsurpassable? When you have the seal of realization from a Buddha, you have realization without a teacher, realization without self. This being so, it is said "A Buddha inherits verification from a Buddha; an ancestor merges verification with an ancestors."(7)

Dogen was obviously deeply moved by the concreteness of transmission documents, which put into form something as vague as satori. He realized that at the heart of transmission documents lay the lifeforce of all the Buddhas of the past and the present. And that to inherit this lineage of the Buddha ancestors and to furthermore transmit it to his own disciples was the way of realization. This interest in transmission documents had an enormous influence on Dogen's Zen in that there was a strong emphasis on having a "true" teacher from which to inherit the Dharma which had been handed down from the time of Shakyamuni. As Dogen states in the "Eihei Shoso Gakudo Yojinshu", "Unless you have a true teacher, it is better not to study." (8) Thus from ancient times, widely visiting true teachers has been an important task for the student to make both the teacher and the student a greater Zen or religious person.

Dogen himself, after the death of Musai Ryoha, went on a journey to find his true teacher, which as is well known, turned out to be Nyojo of Tendozan. Dogen recorded the first time he met Nyojo in the "*Menju*" fascicle of the *Shobgenzo*:

"I first offered incense and bowed formally to my late master, old Buddha Tendo Nyojo, in the abbot's room in 1225. He also saw me for the first time. Upon this occasion he transmitted the Dharma, finger to finger, face to face, and said to me, 'The Dharma gate of face-to-face transmission from Buddha to Buddha, ancestor to ancestor, is realized now.' This itself is holding up a flower on Vulture Peak, or attaining the marrow at Suzan. Or it is transmitting the robe at Obai, or the face-to-face transmission at Tozan. This is Buddha ancestors transmitting the treasury of the eye face to face. It occurs only in our teaching. Other people have not even dreamed of it. Face-to-face transmission

means between Buddha's and ancestor's faces; when Shakyamuni Buddha was in the assembly of Kasho Buddha he received it from Kasho Buddha and has continued this transmission. There are no Buddhas without face-to-face transmission from the Buddha face."(9)

When Dogen first meet Nyojo face to face, he was told, "The Dharma gate of face-to-face transmission from Buddha to Buddha, ancestor to ancestor, is realized now." In other words, Dogen equates meeting the true teacher with moments in Zen history such as "attaining the marrow at Suzan" or "transmitting the robe at Obai" or "the face-to-face transmission at Tozan." Dogen reveals the deep meaning of "face-to-face transmission" (menju) by stressing the importance of meeting one's true teacher which can only happen when both parties involved draw out the best in each other.

Following the meeting with Nyojo Dogen studied rigorously under his purview and learned the concept of ceaseless practice. In 1225, Nyojo held a transmission precept ceremony (*denkai*) and gave Dogen the "Bodhisattva Precepts of the Correct Transmission of the Buddha Ancestors" and two years later in 1227, he gave Dogen a transmission document. Having thus received the Buddha Dharma handed down from Shakyamuni to his teacher, Nyojo, Dogen followed his master's instructions and returned to Japan to do the same. Because the Dharma had been carefully transmitted from master to disciple from Shakyamuni on down, Dogen resolved to gather disciples around him to whom he could transmit the Dharma in the same way. In order to accomplish this, Dogen decided to transmit Nyojo's teachings in Japanese (up until that point most Buddhist teachings were written in Chinese). He provided this easier-to-understand guidelines for his disciples in both the written *Shobogenzo* fascicles and in the form of oral lectures given as the abbot of his monastery.

Once Dogen went to Echizen province, for the two extremely cold years that it took to construct Daibutsuji, he produced a vast number of *Shobogenzo* fascicles. But once the temple was completed, his writings came to a virtual standstill indicating that he put all his energies into the education of his disciples. In other words, once he had completed the *Shobogenzo* as the students' textbook, he put all of his energies into showing the concrete nature of satori with formal discourses at times by illustrating satori with stories, drawing "empty circles" with horse-whisk staffs or by pounding the ground with a staff or it throwing around. Furthermore, Dogen would at times sharply question his disciples about the Dharma "Do you really want to understand the Dharma completely?" and other questions while taking dramatic pauses before reciting a verse. Probably, those formal discourses could not be understood without first having the solid understanding of *Shobogenzo*. In other words, Dogen Zenji's Buddha dharma was completed by the lecture of chapters of the *Shobogenzo* and the formal discourses, later compiled in Dogen's other main work, the *Eiheikoroku*.

Dogen must have understood that if his disciples only studied the *Shobogenzo*, they would simply understand Buddhism on an intellectual level. But on the other hand, if they only listened to the formal discourses, they would not be able to clearly understand Buddhism either. Thus he combined the fundamental Buddhist teachings of the

Shobogenzo with formal discourses as monastic education that involved practice. It is said that toward the end of his career, Dogen emphasized the proper transmission of the Dharma to a small number of people--just one or even a half-a-person (*ikko hanko*)--which reflects the difficulties he must have faced in trying to put his combined method into practice.

Just as the proper transmission of the Dharma from the Buddha on down to his teacher, Nyojo, involved both the receiving and the giving of the Dharma, Dogen realized his own transmission was not complete until he transmitted Nyojo's Dharma to his own disciples. In turn, this process also involved each person in the lineage being a Buddha ancestor both as the giver and receiver of the Dharma. Dogen's understanding of this process was symbolized and crystallized in the transmission document.

II. The Problem of Dharma Transmission in the lineage-restoration Movement

After Dogen's death, his lineage was continued by Ejo, who transmitted the Dharma onto Tetsu Gikai, who became the third abbot of Eihei-ji. His abbotship became entangled, however, in what came to be known as the "Third-Generation Controversy" (*sandai soron*), also involved questions about Dharma transmission. The main problem lay in the fact that Gikai had received Dharma transmission from two masters (Ejo being one of them and the other, a master of the Japanese Darumashu). After receiving much opposition because of this, Gikai was forced to resign his abbotship and henceforth the practice of having only one Dharma transmission master became the norm.

But over time, this policy of having one Dharma transmission master came under question as well because of the "temple-transmission" issue (*garanbo*). From the medieval to the early modern period, the custom of becoming part of the lineage of the temple one was to become the abbot, rather than becoming part of the lineage of one's direct teacher, became prevalent. In other words, a new abbot had to transfer their lineage allegiance to the temple and void the Dharma lineage they had received from their original master. Furthermore, if one became an abbot of a different temple, one had to void the previous lineage allegiance each time one moved. Because of this, the idea and reality of transmission became disordered.

The significance of transmission was disordered in Japan by two types of temple succession systems that coexisted: 1) The "*Jippo juji setsu*" system in which the temple could be headed by anyone seen as being appropriate without regard to their lineage and 2) The "*Ichiryu sozoku setsu*" system in which the temple required their abbots to be of the same lineage as the founder of the temple. The second system would eventually bear the temple-transmission style of Dharma transmission. The more prevalent this style became, the more one had to change lineage allegiances as one moved from temple to temple.

By the mid-Edo period, this issue of the temple-transmission system loomed large within the Soto school. The controversy surrounding this issue was taken up by those belonging to the so-called "lineage-restoration movement" (*shuto fukko undo*). At the center of this

new movement was Manzan Dohaku, with Baiho Jikushin also taking a leading part. Manzan's main claim was that transmission through a person (i.e. one's direct teacher and not through a temple one happened to be an abbot of) was Dogen's original interpretation of transmission. Thus, opposing the temple-transmission system, Manzan stressed both the idea of having only one Dharma transmission master and the idea of face-to-face transmission. He believed that if monks faithfully kept to the idea of having only one Dharma transmission master, there would be no need to change one's lineage every time one moved to a different temple. In addition, if one only received transmission from a master one knew directly (i.e. face-to-face transmission), there would be no need to have to receive transmission from a former master of the temple one was to become abbot (whom one may have never met before). Manzan promoted the lineage-restoration movement by promoting these two principles as a way to return to Dogen's original intention to properly give and receive the Dharma lineage. Manzan's criticism of the temple-transmission system came from his reading of Dogen's criticism of those who used Dharma transmission for their own self-aggrandizement, as found in the "*Shisho*" chapter of the *Shobogenzo*:

At age 56, Manzan joined forces with Baiho Jikushin and went to Edo to promote the lineage-restoration movement. There they met opposition from Jozan Ryoko, who provided counterarguments to their claims, defending the temple-transmission system. Although Manzan and Baiho made their claims to the government's office of temples and shrines (*jisha bugyo*), they did not emerge victorious easily as Jozan's counterarguments influenced the three head administrative temples of the Soto school (the *Kansansatsu*) as well as the two headquarter temples of Eihei-ji and Sojiji.

In 1703, the Edo government recognized Manzan and Baiho's claims and their lineage-restoration movement which argued for the person-centered approach to Dharma transmission. In reality, however, it was not a one-sided victory for Manzan and Baiho, but the government's new policy (which was a politically-negotiated settlement) was one that recognized both the temple-centered and person-centered systems. Nevertheless, this new policy gave strength to Manzan and Baiho's arguments of having only one Dharma transmission master and the idea of face-to-face transmission.

III. Conflicting Views of Transmission

Although the two principles of having only one Dharma transmission master and face-to-face transmission were approved by government orders in 1703 and the lineage-restoration movement came to a sense of closure, in fact, these ideas proved to be quite problematic and further debate on Dharma transmission followed. Manzan's interpretation of the two doctrines was based on Dogen's "*Menju*" fascicle of the *Shobogenzo*:

"Shakyamuni Buddha saw venerable Mahakashyapa in person. Venerable Mahakashyapa saw venerable Ananda in person, and venerable Ananda bowed formally to venerable Mahakashyapa's buddha face. This is face-to-face transmission. Venerable Ananda maintained this face-to-face transmission, closely guided Shonawashu and transmitted

face to face. When venerable Shonawashu respectfully saw venerable Ananda, he was given face-to-face transmission and received face-to-face transmission, just face to face. Thus, the authentic ancestors of all generations have continued face-to-face transmission, disciple seeing teacher, and teacher seeing disciple. An ancestor, a teacher, or disciple cannot be a Buddha or an ancestor without having face-to-face transmission."(10)

In other words, Dogen points to the enduring nature of the Dharma based on master and disciple interacting with each other face-to-face. In fact, Manzan's own interpretation of Dharma transmission placed the greatest emphasis on the ritual aspect of face-to-face interaction.

Within the lineage-restoration movement there were differences of opinion about the nature of Dharma transmission, as seen for example, in the differing views of Manzan and his contemporary, Doku'an Genko. Doku'an, for instance, criticized what he considered to be Manzan's overly ritualistic interpretation of face-to-face transmission. In its stead, Doku'an stressed the quality or the content of the Dharma transmission itself, that is to say, whether the student had attained the teachings. So, although Manzan and Doku'an equally countered the temple-transmission system, after the 1703 government decision which basically decided in their favor, the disagreements between the two came to the fore.

In fact, Doku'an passed away in 1698, five years prior to the government decision. However the position he represented and the position Manzan represented were argued over by other leading figures of the Soto school. Doku'an's position was most forcefully argued by Tenkei Denson (1648-1735). Thus the disagreement between Manzan and Doku'an, became one between Manzan and Tenkei. Like Doku'an, Tenkei agreed with the two principles that Manzan had outlined as crucial to proper Dharma transmission, but disagreed over their interpretation in a highly nuanced way.

For Tenkei, the real meaning of Dharma transmission was not necessarily about coming face-to-face with a particular teacher in a ritualistic way, but to meet with the true face of the self. In other words, while the two emphasized the importance of face-to-face Dharma transmission, Manzan placed form over the content, while Tenkei argued for content over the form in which the transmission was to take place. Both of them sincerely believed in the significance of their position and neither gave up ground in debates. Because of this, their disagreements were not resolved and even led to leading doctrinal specialists taking sides over the debate. On the Manzan side were monks like Otsudo Kanchu (?-1760), Menzan Zuiho (1683-1769), and Banjin Dotan (1698-1775). And on the Tenkei side were Mankai Issen (?-1756) and Fuyo Roran (1724-1805). Although the debate over Dharma transmission that went back and forth between these two camps is crucial to understanding Soto history, we must recall that this debate took place during the controlling environment of the Edo period. What this meant was that the Manzan side, which was seen as the orthodox group by the government, had a clear upper hand in the debate, so much so that those associated with Tenkei were seen as being in a "Tenkei hell." Such being the case, the orthodox group had the upper hand until the Taisho period and the Tenkei approach has not received positive evaluation until fairly recently.

III. Dharma Transmission Today and in the Future

The Edo government's politically-negotiated policy which recognized both the temple-centered and person-centered systems of Dharma transmission came to an end in 1875. It was then that the newly-formed Sotoshu headquarters (Sotoshu shumukyoku) sent out a directive completely abolishing the temple-transmission system, which had always seemed to run counter to the sect's doctrines. In other words, the efforts of Manzan, Baiho, and other members of the lineage-restoration movement finally came to fruition 170 years later with this directive. However, the directive utterly ignored the arguments of the Tenkei faction, stressing the significance of the ritual aspects of Dharma transmission which was central to the Manzan faction. This leaves open the question of whether the Tenkei faction's claims that the most important aspect of transmission lies in the content of what's transmitted have received sufficient reflection.

Especially if we reflect on this transmission question with Dogen's teachings in mind, there is great evidence (as discussed in the Dogen section above) that he placed just as much emphasis on the content of the transmission as its ritual form. In other words, for Dogen, to reflect on the real meaning of Dharma transmission would be of much greater importance than whether or not one followed a temple-center or person-centered transmission system.

However, in contemporary Japan, the most common form of transmission is to transmit the Dharma from father to son. So although this transmission system can be called a person-centered one, it is at the same time, a temple-based transmission system as well because the son inherits the father's abbotship. The temple-based transmission system, though officially abolished in 1875, has come back to life in this practice of familial inheritance of temples.

Thus we in the Soto school need to seriously reflect on the appropriateness of the contemporary state of Dharma transmission in Japan. Reflecting on both Dogen's own understanding of Dharma transmission as well as the Edo-period commentators, we must take a hard look at the reality of the situation today and ask ourselves whether the custom of familial inheritance of temples is really appropriate.

Given this moment in the Soto school's history, in other words, the 800th anniversary of Dogen's birth, it is a perfect opportunity for us to reflect on the real meaning of what it means to transmit the Dharma. Just as the Edo-period monks tried to revive their sect, we should not discard them as historical relics, but can learn from them as to how to revive our school today.