

On the Record of Transmission

(*Shisho*)

Translator’s Introduction: In this text which he wrote for his monks, Dōgen takes up the topic of the *shisho*, the name of a Buddhist document which may literally be translated as ‘the record of the inheritors’. This record is usually written on silk, and it consists of a listing of the names of those in the Ancestral line from Shakyamuni Buddha up to the person receiving the record, all of whom are considered to be inheritors of the Dharma. In a narrow sense, this physical record pertains to the certification connected with formal Transmission. In the latter part of this text, Dōgen describes various Transmission Silks that he saw during his sojourn in China.

The Record of Transmission, however, has a deeper significance, one that goes beyond a conventional historical approach to the topic of ancestral succession. This spiritual significance, as Dōgen tells us at the end of this work, was taught to him by his Master Tendō Nyojō, and it colors his whole discussion: namely, that the inheritance of the Dharma flows not only from Master to disciple but also from disciple to Master. This implies, among other things, that fundamentally there is no separate self that receives the Transmission, nor any other that gives It.

In various other discourses, Dōgen’s references to the Dharma that is inherited may have been intended to encompass the whole body of what the Buddha taught, while in this text the references could be intended to point in particular to the Precepts, since the receiving of the Precepts in the Sōtō tradition is an inheritance of Dharma common to lay ordination, monastic ordination, and formal Transmission.

*I, Dōgen, a mendicant monk of the fifty-first generation, now at Kannonōri in Kōshōhōrin-ji Temple, who went to Sung China in order to receive and then Transmit the Dharma, have respectfully written down this document for those descendants in our lineage who desire that their attesting to the Truth be certified by means of the Record of Transmission of the Dharma that Buddhas inherit from Buddhas, and Ancestors inherit from Ancestors.*¹

Beyond doubt, Buddha after Buddha has inherited the Dharma from Buddha after Buddha and, beyond doubt, Ancestor after Ancestor has inherited the Dharma from Ancestor after Ancestor. This is Their direct experiencing of what has been promised.² It is the simple, direct, one-to-one Transmission and, because of this, it

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1. This opening statement prefaces the original text.
 2. This phrase translates Dōgen’s highly truncated technical term for the direct experiencing of the fulfillment of Shakyamuni Buddha’s promise that all sentient beings, without exception, will—as He did—ultimately become Buddha.

is the unsurpassed state of enlightenment. If one is not a Buddha, one cannot give the seal of certification* to a Buddha, and no one ever becomes a Buddha without receiving a Buddha's seal of certification. Who other than a Buddha could declare this state to be the most honored or certify it to be unsurpassed?

When we receive the Buddha's seal of certification, it is because we have spontaneously awakened, independent of a Master, and because we have spontaneously awakened, independent of a self. This is why it is said that Buddha after Buddha has inherited the certification and Ancestor after Ancestor has experienced what was promised. The fundamental meaning of this principle cannot be clearly resolved except between Buddha and Buddha. How could it possibly be like what is surmised by those at any of the various stages along the Bodhisattva* Path, to say nothing of what doctrinal teachers or mundane commentators on Scriptural texts reckon it to be! In whatever way we may try to explain it to others, they cannot really hear what is being said, because it is something that Buddhas inherit from Buddhas.

The Buddha's Way has been thoroughly mastered solely by Buddha after Buddha, and there has never been a time when there was not a succession of Buddha after Buddha. By way of analogy, there is the situation of 'stones successively inheriting from stones' and of 'jewels successively inheriting from jewels'.³ The succession of Ancestors resembles 'the mutual inheriting by chrysanthemums' and 'the giving of the seal of certification by pines': in both cases, there is not the slightest gap between the previous chrysanthemums and the ones that follow, nor is there any gap between the previous pines and the ones that follow.⁴ Those folks who are unclear about such things may indeed encounter the words and ways which Buddha after Buddha has correctly passed on, yet they do not have the slightest clue as to what they have heard, for they have never grasped the meaning of the phrase "Ancestor after Ancestor has experienced what was

* See *Glossary*.

3. The term 'stones' is often used to describe the dull, hard minds of those who have not yet awakened to Truth, whereas 'jewels' would be descriptive of the bright, clear minds of those who have awakened. In the present context, this would imply that what Buddha after Buddha has inherited is not the same as what people in ordinary, everyday society culturally inherit.
4. From context, it is likely that 'the mutual inheriting by chrysanthemums' refers to the horizontal relationship of Master and disciple, wherein both are equal in their Buddha Nature. 'The giving of the seal of certification by pines' refers to the vertical relationship of senior Master and junior disciple. The Master-disciple relationship contains both of these aspects at the same time.

promised, which is what Buddha after Buddha has been heir to.” Sad to say, even though such people may bear a superficial resemblance to the progeny of Buddhas, they are not disciples of the Buddha, nor are they Buddhas who have disciples.



The Sixth Chinese Ancestor, while dwelling on Mount Sōkei, once pointed out to his assembly, “From the Seven Buddhas* to me, Enō, there have been forty generations of Buddhas, and from me, Enō, to the Seven Buddhas, there have been forty generations of Ancestors.” This principle is clearly the correct doctrine of the succession of Buddhas and Ancestors. Among the Seven Buddhas, there are Those who manifested in the past Eon of the Sublime, and there are Those who manifested in the present Eon of the Wise and Virtuous.⁵ In addition to this, that which links the Face-to-Face Transmission of the Forty Ancestors is the path of the Buddhas, the succession of Buddhas.

Thus, when we proceed from the Sixth Chinese Ancestor to the Seven Buddhas, there is the succession of forty Ancestors. In proceeding from the Seven Buddhas to the Sixth Ancestor, there is the succession of forty Buddhas. Both the path of Buddhas and the path of Ancestors are just like this. If we do not experience what was promised, if we are not an Ancestor of the Buddha, then we will lack the spiritually wise discernment of a Buddha, and we will lack an Ancestor’s full realization of the True Nature of things. A Buddha lacking spiritually wise discernment would be a Buddha devoid of faith: an Ancestor without full realization of the True Nature of things would be an Ancestor lacking the experience of what was promised. The forty Ancestors whom I have referred to here are just the Ones who are in our specific lineage.

In accord with what I have been saying, the process of succession of Buddha after Buddha is something that is extraordinarily profound. It is completely resolute, neither retreating nor deviating: it is unbroken in its continuity and has never died out. The fundamental point of this process is that, even though Shakyamuni Buddha had realized the Truth prior to the age of the Seven Buddhas, it was a long time before He inherited the Dharma from Kashō Buddha. Although it is said that He realized the Truth on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, thirty years after His birth, this was His realizing the Truth prior to all the various Buddhas, and it was His realizing the Truth shoulder-to-shoulder and

5. The first three of these Buddhas (Bibashi, Shiki, and Bishafu) are said to have appeared in what is called the Eon of the Sublime, which precedes our own; the remaining four Buddhas (Kuruson, Kunagonmuni, Kashō, and Shakyamuni) are said to have appeared in our own eon, described as the Eon of the Wise and Virtuous.

simultaneously with the various Buddhas; it was His realizing the Truth both prior to and subsequent to all the various Buddhas.

Further, there is a principle that needs your meditative investigation: Kashō Buddha inherited the Dharma from Shakyamuni Buddha. Should you not know this principle, you will not clarify what the Buddha's Truth is, and if you do not clarify what the Buddha's Truth is, you will not be an heir of the Buddha. 'An heir of the Buddha' is the same as 'a disciple of the Buddha'.

Shakyamuni once inspired Ananda to ask, "Pray, whose disciples are the various Buddhas of the past?" Shakyamuni Buddha responded, "The various Buddhas of the past are My disciples." All the various Buddhas behave in a similar Buddhist way. To respectfully serve these various Buddhas, to inherit the Buddha Dharma, and to bring this inheritance to fruition, this surely is the Way of the Buddhas for Buddha after Buddha. And, without fail, when someone inherits the Dharma of this Way of Buddhas, there will invariably be a record of inheritance.⁶

Anyone who has not inherited the Dharma will be a person outside the Buddhist Way, one who has not recognized what karmic* cause and effect are, but thinks that things are the way they are because of their inherent nature. If the Way of the Buddhas had not determined the succession of the Dharma, how could It possibly have come down to us today? For this reason, with Buddha after Buddha, there has been, beyond doubt, the passing on of a record of Buddha Transmitting Buddha, and there has been the acquiring of that record of Buddha Transmitting Buddha. The nature of that record of Transmission is, for one person, the inheriting of the Dharma by clarifying 'sun, moon, and stars', and, for another, the inheriting of the Dharma by obtaining Its Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow. Or it is the passing on of a kesa,* or the passing on of a traveling staff, or the passing on of a pine branch, or the passing on of a ceremonial hossu,* or the passing on of an udumbara blossom, or the passing on of a gold brocade robe. There has also been the passing on of a straw sandal and the passing on of a stick of bamboo.

When these inheritances of the Dharma are passed on, the recipient may record the succession with blood taken from a finger or from the tongue. And the record may also be written with oil or milk. These are all records of Transmission. The one who passes It on and the one who receives It are both, indeed, heirs of the Buddha. When they fully manifest as Ancestors of the Buddha, their inheriting of the Dharma will undoubtedly fully manifest as well. When It manifested, It came even though they did not expect It, and many are the Ancestors of the Buddha who

6. This would include not only those monks who had been Transmitted, but also all ordained monks and those of the laity who had committed themselves to the Buddhist Way by doing Jukai, the Ceremony of Receiving the Precepts.

inherited the Dharma even though they did not deliberately seek It. Those who have inherited the Dharma are, beyond any doubt, Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor.



Ever since our Twenty-eighth Ancestor Bodhidharma came from the West, we in eastern lands have correctly heard the fundamental point that within the Buddha's Way there is an inheriting of the Dharma. Before then, this had not been heard of here in the eastern lands. It was something not yet realized or even known about by scriptural scholars and teachers of the *Tripitaka** in India, as well as being beyond the realm of those who are 'thrice wise and ten times saintly'.* Nor was its existence even suspected by those would-be teachers of mantric techniques, among others, who go searching for them through the *Tripitaka*. How sad that they have received a human body—which is a vessel of the Truth—and, at the same time, have vainly become enmeshed in the web of academic theories, ignorant of the method for attaining liberation and devoid of any expectation of a time when they might spring free. This is why we should, indeed, continually explore the Way through our training and should, indeed, wholeheartedly keep to the spirit of training.



When I was in Sung China, I was able to bow in reverence to various records of Transmission, for there were many styles of Transmission records. Among them was that of Iitsu, who was a retired Master living in the West Hall at Keitoku-ji Temple,⁷ where he had finally hung up his traveling staff. He was a man from the Yüeh District and the former Abbot of Kōfuku-ji Temple. He was from the same village as my late teacher. My late teacher was always saying, "You should go ask Iitsu in the West Hall about the customs of our region." One day, Iitsu said to me, "Being able to look at ancient pieces of calligraphy is something that we humans prize very highly. How many have you already seen?" I replied, "I've just seen a few." Then he said, "I have an old scroll of calligraphy somewhere among my belongings. It's not much of a thing. But I'll let you have a look at it, venerable brother." When I looked at what he brought out, it was a Transmission record that had belonged to a ninth-century disciple of Hōgen. It had been obtained from among the robes and alms bowl of some elderly master upon his decease. It was not Iitsu's Transmission record. On it was written, "The First Ancestor Makakashō awoke to the Truth under Shakyamuni Buddha, and Shakyamuni

7. The Abbot of Keitoku-ji Temple during this time was Tendō Nyōjō, Dōgen's Master.

Buddha awoke to the Truth under Kashō Buddha.” That was the way it was put. Having seen these words, I, Dōgen, was convinced that there is a Dharma Transmission from a true heir to a true heir. It was Dharma that I had never seen before. This was an occasion when the Buddhas and the Ancestors, unseen, responded to the needs of one of Their offspring. My feelings of gratitude could not match the moment.

The Venerable Master Shūgetsu, while a senior monk at Keitoku-ji Temple, also showed me a Transmission record, one that he said belonged to Ummon’s lineage. The name of the Master just preceding the person who was receiving the Transmission record, along with those of the Indian and Chinese Ancestors of the Buddha, were arranged in columns, below which was the name of the person receiving the Transmission record. It made a link from all the Buddhas and Ancestors directly to the name of the new Ancestor. Thus, the names from the Tathagata through some forty generations all came down to the name of the new heir. It was as if he were being certified by each new Ancestor in turn. Some names, however, such as Makakashō and Ananda, were lined up as if they belonged to branches other than his. I then asked Senior Monk Shūgetsu, “Venerable monk, when we list the lineages of the five Zen families today, there are a few differences from this. What is at the heart of this? If there has been a succession of heirs from India one after the other, how can there be any differences?” Shūgetsu replied, “Even if the differences were far greater, still, we should simply pass on that the Buddhas of Mount Ummon are like this. Why is our Venerable Master Shakyamuni revered so deeply by others? He is deeply revered because He awoke to the Truth. Why is Great Master Ummon revered so deeply by others? He is deeply revered because he awoke to the Truth.” When I heard these words, I had a bit more understanding.



Nowadays in the provinces of Kiangsu and Chekiang, the heads of the large temples, by and large, are Dharma heirs of Rinzhai, Ummon, or Tōzan. However, a bunch of fellows who proclaim themselves to be distantly related to Rinzhai are up to something that is just not right. They join the assembly of some prominent Master, purportedly to train, and then earnestly beg him for a hanging portrait or a scroll inscribed with some Dharma saying, which they then store up for future use as proof of their being this Master’s Dharma heir. As if this were not enough, there are among such types those ‘dogs’ who, having earnestly requested, say, a Dharma inscription or a portrait from some venerable monk, hoard such objects until their store of them is quite large. Then, when they reach their later years, they bribe some official to get themselves a temple. At the time when they are appointed its

chief monk, they are not Dharma heirs of the Master who gave them the Dharma inscription or the portrait. When they do inherit the Dharma, either from their contemporary monks who have become celebrities or from senior monks who have intimate connections with rulers and their ministers, they are not asking for the Dharma, but are only greedy for fame and reputation. What a pity that such wicked customs exist in these evil times when the Dharma is coming to an end! Among people like these, not even one has ever seen or heard of the Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors, even in his dreams.

Customarily, as to a Master's granting a monk something like a copy of a Dharma saying or a portrait, such things are also given to scholastic lecturers belonging to various branches of Buddhism and to householders, male and female. They are also granted to lay temple workers, tradesmen, and the like. The truth of this is clear from the records of the various branches. On the other hand, even those who are not sincere followers may implore a Master for a scroll of calligraphy because they crave evidence of their being a Dharma heir and, even though it is a situation that the Master, as one who has realized the Truth, deplors, he reluctantly takes brush in hand. In such a situation, he does not use the traditional way of expressing the matter, but signs it with some phrase like 'your Master is me'. In recent times, the procedure is simply for some monk to inherit the Dharma as a Master as soon as he attains any degree of proficiency in his Master's assembly. And many indeed are the fellows who have never received their Master's seal, but who simply pay perfunctory visits to the Master's quarters, enter the Lecture Hall, and occupy a place in the Meditation Hall. Even though the Master is residing in the temple, they do not make the time to receive his personal instruction, yet they claim that Master to be their Master, should they happen to break open the Great Matter.⁸



There was a monk known as Chief Librarian Den, who was a remote descendant of the Rinzai Meditation Master Butsugen, this Master also being known by the name of Seien of Ryūmon Temple. Chief Librarian Den also carried a Transmission record with him. Near the beginning of the Chinese Chia-ting Era, when he became ill, he was nursed by a Japanese senior monk named Ryūzen. After his recovery, to show his appreciation for Ryūzen's considerate care, he took

8. That is, such persons may have had a genuine realization of the Truth, but they have not truly trained with the Master, to say nothing of having gone to the Master in order to have their understanding certified.

out the Transmission record and let Ryūzen bow to it, saying, “This is something rare to see. I offer it to you that you may pay your respects to it.”

Eight years later, in the autumn of the sixteenth year of the same era (1223), during my first sojourn on Mount Tendō, Senior Monk Ryūzen asked Den to show me his Transmission record. This Transmission record was such that the names of forty-five Ancestors, from the Seven Buddhas down to Rinzai, were written out in columns, while the names of the Masters following Rinzai formed a circle in which their inscribed Dharma names were sealed with their monograms. The name of the new heir was written at the end of the record, below the date. We need to recognize that the form of this record in no way differs from that of Rinzai’s other venerable disciples.



My late Master, the Abbot of Keitoku-ji Temple, strongly cautioned his assembly about speaking in an imprudent way about someone’s inheriting the Dharma. Truly, my late Master’s assembly was a veritable ‘assembly of the ancient Buddha’, a restoration of the Buddha’s ‘monastic forest’. My late Master did not personally wear multi-colored kesas. Although the variegated, patchwork kesa of Meditation Master Dōkai of Mount Fuyō had been passed on to him, he did not use it, even when he sat in the teacher’s seat in the Lecture Hall. In short, he never wore a brocaded Dharma robe in his whole life as Abbot. Everyone, both the thoughtful and the naive, praised him for this and esteemed him as a true spiritual friend.

When my late Master entered the Lecture Hall, he would admonish all those about him, saying, “Recently, a bunch who style themselves as ones who follow the Way of our Ancestor Bodhidharma irresponsibly go about wearing a Dharma robe along with their long hair and signing their name with the title of Master as their way of navigating themselves to prominence. How pitiful! Who will rescue them? I regret to say that there are senior monks, far and wide, who have no heart for the Way and so they do not investigate It or train in It. Even rarer—not one in a hundred thousand—are those who have seen or heard of the relationship between the Transmission record and inheriting the Dharma. This is indeed the decline of the Way of our Ancestor Bodhidharma!” He was constantly admonishing us in this way, but none of the senior monks ever took offence. Therefore, if trainees do their utmost to practice the Way with a sincere heart, they will see and hear that there is a Transmission record. This seeing and hearing will be part of their exploring the Way through their training.



In a Rinzai Transmission record, the name of the Master is written first, and then the name of the disciple who came to train with him, followed by the phrase ‘entered my assembly, entered my training hall, and was made my heir’, followed by the list of names of those Ancestors of the previous generations. This record also contains a bit of instruction on the Dharma which the Master has expressed in his own words. The basic import of this record is simply that an heir has encountered a genuine ‘good spiritual friend’: this is the truly fundamental point. There is no need to be concerned with whether these names come at the end or the beginning of the record. I saw one from the Rinzai tradition that was written in this manner. I put it down here just as I actually saw it:⁹

Chief Librarian Ryōha was a person of authority and military valor. He is now my disciple.

I, Tokkō, trained under and served Abbot Daie Sōkō of Mount Kinzan,

Kinzan was an heir to Engo Kokugon of Mount Kassan,
 Engo was an heir to Goso Hōen of Mount Yōgi,
 Hōen was an heir to Kaie Shutan of Mount Hakuun,
 Shutan was an heir to Hōe of Mount Yōgi,
 Hōe was an heir to Jimyō Soen,
 Soen was an heir to Fun’yō Zenshō,
 Zenshō was an heir to Shōnen of Mount Shuzan,
 Shōnen was an heir to Enshō of Mount Fuketsu,
 Enshō was an heir to Nan’in Egyō,
 Egyō was an heir to Sonshō of Kōke Temple,
 Sonshō was an heir to the Great Founding Ancestor Rinzai.

Meditation Master Busshō Tokkō wrote this whilst on Mount Ashoka and gave it to Musai Ryōha. When the latter became Abbot of Keitoku-ji Temple,¹⁰ his junior disciple Chikō brought it out and showed it to me in private in the Dormitory of Clarity. I first saw it on the twenty-first day of the first lunar month in the seventeenth year in the Chia-ting Era of Great Sung China (February 11, 1224). My joy was immeasurable! My seeing it was surely due to unseen help from

9. The original text gives some Chinese names in abbreviated form; the translation has supplied fuller, Japanese forms for them.

10. When Musai Ryōha was approaching death, he invited Nyojō to become the next Abbot of Keitoku-ji Temple on Mount Tendō. Nyojō accepted and became known as Tendō Nyojō.

the Buddhas and Ancestors. After offering incense and respectfully bowing, I opened it and read it.

My desire to be shown this Transmission record arose around the seventh lunar month of the previous year, when the temple comptroller Shikō told me about it in private while we were in the Hall of Serene Light. I asked the comptroller in passing, “In whose care is it at present?” The comptroller answered, “Apparently, it is in the venerable Abbot’s quarters. Later, if you were to ask him in a cordial way to show it to you, I am sure he would do so.” After I heard these words, my intention to make a request for it did not let up day or night. So, in the following year, and with some trepidation, I put my request to the Abbot’s junior disciple Chikō in a friendly way, placing my whole heart in it, and my request was indeed granted.

The wrapper to which it was attached was covered with white silk on the inside and with red brocade on the outside. Its spindle was of jade. It was a scroll about nine inches high and over seven feet wide. As it was not something shown to the idle or the curious, I duly offered my thanks to Chikō, and forthwith went to the Abbot, made an incense offering, respectfully bowed, and gave my thanks to the Venerable Musai. Musai then said to me, “Those who get a chance to see and know this particular object are very few. You, my venerable elder brother, have now come to know it. This is the real refuge for exploring the Way through your training, and just so!” Nothing had ever surpassed the joy that I felt then.



Later, around the time of the Chinese Pao-ching Era (1225-1227), when I was drifting like a cloud from monastery to monastery on such mountains as Tendai and Gantō, I came to Mannen Temple in the P’ing-t’ien region. The Abbot at the time was the Venerable Genshi of Fukushū. Upon the retirement of Abbot Shūkan, the Venerable Genshi had been appointed to the post, and he was strongly encouraging the practice of seated meditation in the temple. Following the customary salutations, we took up the topic of the various customs and traditions of the Ancestors of the Buddha down through the ages. While I was proffering the story about Isan Reiyū asking Kyōzan about the quality of the latter’s recent heirs, the Abbot asked, “Have you ever seen the Transmission record that I have here?” I replied, “How could I have seen it?” The Abbot then stood up and, holding up his Transmission record, he said, “Even if someone were a close friend, even if he were someone who had spent years as my attendant monk, I would not permit him to see this. This is, of course, the Dharma instruction of the Buddhas and the Ancestors. But, be that as it may,” Genshi said, “once when I was on my customary trip to the city with the intention of visiting the governor, I experienced a vision. In

it, there was a distinguished monk who looked like Meditation Master Daibai Hōjō. Holding aloft a branch of plum blossoms, he said, ‘If you should meet a Real Person who has already crossed over by ferry, do not begrudge him these flowers,’ and then he handed me the plum blossoms. In response, I spontaneously chanted, ‘Before he even entered the boat, he deserved thirty blows.’ Not five days had passed, when I met you face-to-face, my venerable elder brother, and what is more, you have come by boat. And, in addition, this Transmission record of mine is written on damask that has a plum blossom pattern woven into it. Since you correspond to the one mentioned in the vision, you must be the one whom Daibai was instructing me about. Venerable elder brother, do you wish to be my Dharma heir? If you do, I would be delighted to Transmit you.”

In no way could I ignore his feeling of trust. Although I could have received the Transmission, instead I simply lit incense, reverently bowed to the record, and gave the Abbot my deepest respect and veneration as an offering. At the time, there was an incense monk in attendance, one named Hōnei, who said that it was the first time that he had ever seen a Transmission record.

I thought to myself, “Truly, were it not for the unseen help of the Buddhas and Ancestors, it would have been nigh on impossible for me to have seen or even heard about this sort of thing. What good fortune that I, a foolish and ignorant fellow from a remote country, have seen so many of them,” and tears of gratitude wet my sleeves. At that time, the Vimalakirti* Room for lay guests and the Chief Monk’s Hall, among others, were quiet and unoccupied. This Transmission record was written on white silk with a plum blossom pattern. It was over nine inches high and more than six feet wide. Its spindle was of topaz and its outer cover was of silk.

On my way back from Mount Tendai to Mount Tendō, I was staying the night in the hall for traveling monks at Goshō-ji Temple on Mount Daibai, where I experienced a wondrous vision in which Ancestral Master Daibai came and offered me a branch of plum flowers in full bloom. The vision of an Ancestor is the most reliable thing there is. The blossoms on the branch were more than a foot in diameter. The plum blossom must surely be an udumbara flower!¹¹ What is seen in a vision and what is seen in a waking state will be equally real. While I was in

11. The plum tree blooms in late winter and, as the first plant to blossom, is traditionally considered in the Far East as the harbinger of spring. In Buddhist texts, it is often associated with Shakyamuni Buddha. The udumbara tree is said to blossom only once every three thousand years. Its flower is often used in Buddhist writings as an illustration of how difficult it is to encounter the Dharma. Both types of blossoms are frequently used as symbols for the Transmission of the Dharma.

Sung China and since my return to this country, I have not told this to anyone before.



At the present time, the writing of a Transmission record in our Tōzan lineage is different from that in others, such as the Rinzai lineage. Our monastery's Founding Ancestor Seigen, in front of the desk of his Master Daikan Enō, wrote out with blood that flowed from his finger that which had been kept under the robe of the Buddha's Ancestor Enō. Tradition has it that the passing on of the record was done by Seigen mixing the blood from his finger with that of Enō. Tradition also has it that the ceremony of mixing blood also occurred in the case of our First Ancestor Bodhidharma and our Second Ancestor Eka. To refrain from writing such things as "My disciple So-and-so" or "So-and-so came to train with me" is the rule for Transmission records which various Buddhas, including the Seven Buddhas, have written and passed on.

So, keep in mind that Enō graciously blended his blood and spirit with Seigen's immaculate blood, and Seigen's immaculate blood personally blended with the parental blood of Enō. Thus, our distinguished Ancestor, Venerable Seigen, and he alone, was the only one to so intimately receive Enō's direct certification; it is not something that his other disciples attained. Folks who know about these matters are wont to say that Enō Transmitted the Buddha Dharma directly to Seigen, and to Seigen alone.



The Record of Transmission

My late teacher, an Old Buddha, the Great Master and Abbot of Keitoku-ji Temple, once said to me, "All the Buddhas have, beyond doubt, inherited the Dharma. That is to say, Shakyamuni Buddha inherited the Dharma from Kashō Buddha. Kashō Buddha inherited the Dharma from Kunagonmuni Buddha. Kunagonmuni Buddha inherited the Dharma from Kuruson Buddha. You must have faith that Buddha after Buddha has inherited It in this manner, reaching down to us now, for this is how we explore the Way of the Buddhas through our training."

I then said to him, "It was after Kashō Buddha had entered nirvana that Shakyamuni Buddha first emerged into the world and realized the Truth. Moreover, how could the Buddhas of the present Eon of the Wise and Virtuous have inherited the Dharma from the Buddhas in the previous Eon of the Sublime? What do you think?"

My late teacher responded, “What you have said is an interpretation based on your listening to scholarly theories. It is an expression of those who are thrice wise and ten times saintly. It is not something that those in the succession of legitimate heirs of the Buddhas and Ancestors say. Our way of Transmission from Buddha to Buddha is not like that. We have learned that Shakyamuni Buddha, beyond any doubt whatsoever, inherited the Dharma from Kashō Buddha. Through our spiritual exploring, we learn that after Shakyamuni Buddha inherited the Dharma, Kashō Buddha entered nirvana. If Shakyamuni Buddha had not inherited the Dharma from Kashō Buddha, He would have been the same as some non-Buddhist who denies cause and effect, so who then could have faith in Shakyamuni Buddha? Because the inheritance passes from Buddha to Buddha in this manner and has come down to us today, all the Buddhas, individually, are genuine heirs. It is not that They are lined up, one after the other, nor is it that They are gathered together in a mass. We just learn that the inheritance passes from Buddha to Buddha in this manner. Do not get all embroiled with the measurements of eons or the measurements of lifespans as spoken of literally in the various *Āgama Scriptures*. If we say that the succession started just with Shakyamuni Buddha, that would merely be some two thousand or so years ago, which is not all that old. The Transmission would barely cover some forty generations. It could be said to be relatively new. The succession of Buddhas is not to be investigated in this manner. We learn that Shakyamuni Buddha inherited the Dharma from Kashō Buddha, and we learn that Kashō Buddha inherited the Dharma from Shakyamuni Buddha. When we learn the matter in this way, it will be the true succession of Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor.”

Then, for the first time, not only did I receive this serving of his spiritually nourishing rice, namely, that we have the Transmission of the Dharma from the Buddhas and Ancestors, but I also let go of some old cobwebs from my past.

Written on the twenty-seventh day of the third lunar month in the second year of the Japanese Ninji era (April 9, 1241) at Kannon-dōri in Kōshōhōrin-ji Temple by me, the mendicant monk Dōgen, who went into Sung China in order to receive and then Transmit the Dharma.

Copied by me on the twenty-fifth day of the second lunar month in the fourth year of the Ninji era (March 17, 1243).

*Ejō,
Abbot's Assistant*