

## On a Monk's Bowl

(*Hatsu'u*)

**Translator's Introduction:** 'A monk's bowl' (*hatsu'u*) refers not only to the physical object that is given to novices upon their being ordained and which is to serve as their mealtime bowl from then on, but also to the monk's willingness to accept of whatever is placed in one's 'bowl', be it physically or spiritually. It is therefore a symbol of the practice of all-acceptance.

Prior to the Seven Buddhas,\* there was the Essential Matter\* which was genuinely Transmitted to the Seven Buddhas. It was genuinely Transmitted from each of the Seven Buddhas down through each of the Seven Buddhas, so that It was genuinely Transmitted from the Seven Buddhas as a whole to the Seven Buddhas as a whole. It was genuinely Transmitted from the Seven Buddhas down through twenty-eight generations of Indian Ancestors. The twenty-eighth generation Ancestral Master, our Founding Ancestor Bodhidharma, personally went to China and genuinely Transmitted It to the second Ancestor in China, our great Ancestor Eka. It passed on through six generations from Bodhidharma until It reached Enō. What has been passed on from India through the Eastern lands for a total of fifty-one Transmissions is the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching,<sup>1</sup> which is the Wondrous Heart of Nirvana: It is a monk's kesa\* and a monk's bowl. Buddhas of the past have taken great care to genuinely Transmit them to other Buddhas of the past. This is the way that Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor have accurately Transmitted them.

At the same time, each and every one of Them has had Their way of expressing what Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow mean, as well as Fist and Eye, which They employed to explore through Their training what Buddhas and Ancestors are. Some have explored through Their training that a monk's bowl is the trusting heart of the Buddhas and Ancestors. And some have explored through Their training that a monk's bowl is a receptacle for what nourishes Buddhas and Ancestors. And some have explored through Their training that a monk's bowl is

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\* See *Glossary*.

1. There are fifty-one Transmissions counting from Makakashō through Dōgen.

the very Eye of Buddhas and Ancestors. And some have explored through Their training that a monk's bowl is the very luminosity of Buddhas and Ancestors. And some have explored through Their training that a monk's bowl is the True Body of the Buddhas and Ancestors. And some have explored through Their training that a monk's bowl is the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching, which is the Wondrous Heart of Nirvana. And some have explored through Their training that a monk's bowl is the place where Buddhas and Ancestors have turned Themselves around. And some have explored through Their training that the Buddhas and Ancestors are the rim and bottom of a monk's bowl. The principle underlying the exploring that such monastics do is expressed by each in his or her particular way, and there is something deeper to be explored.



On the day in the first year of the Pao-ching era of Great Sung China (1225), when my late Master, the Old Buddha of Tendō, assumed the role of Abbot of Tendō, he entered the Dharma Hall and said the following:

I remember a story. A monk once asked Hyakujō, “What is this thing about something being miraculous?” Hyakujō replied, “It is your sitting all by yourself on Daiyū Peak.”<sup>2</sup>

You in this great assembly should not be disturbed by this. Just let the Old Fellow kill Himself with sitting! If someone here today should suddenly ask me what a miracle is, I would simply say to that person, “What is miraculous in the first place?” Ultimately, what else is there? I have brought my monk's bowl with me from Jinzu Temple to eat my meals from.<sup>3</sup>

You need to know that what is miraculous is done for the sake of those who are already miraculous. For that which is miraculous, you need to use a miraculous tool, since this is a miraculous occasion. Accordingly, what manifests as something miraculous is the miraculous bowl of a monk. Thereby, you should call on the Four Guardian Kings to protect it and the various dragon lords to defend it, since this bowl is what we dedicate to the Buddhas and Ancestors and what They have entrusted to us.

Those folks who do not explore the Matter through their training within the private quarters of an Ancestor of the Buddha are given to saying that a Buddhist

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2. Daiyū Peak was the site of Hyakujō's temple.

3. Before being invited to be Abbot of Tendō, Nyojō was serving as Abbot of Jinzu Temple.

monk's kesa is something that is made of silk, or of cotton, or of some other spun material, or to saying that a Buddhist monk's bowl is something made of stone, or of porcelain, or of metal. They talk like this because they are not yet equipped with the Eye for training with a Master. The Buddha's kesa is a kesa for a Buddha. Further, you should not look upon it as being of silk or cotton. Considering it to be of such things as silk or cotton is an outmoded perspective. A Buddhist monk's bowl is a bowl for a Buddhist monk. Again, do not speak of it as being of stone or porcelain, or of metal or wood.

To speak more generally, a Buddhist monk's bowl is not something that is manufactured, nor is it something that arises only to later pass away, nor is it something that comes or goes, nor is it something subject to gain or loss. It does not span the new and old, nor is it connected with what is of the past or of the present. Even if the robe and bowl of the Buddhas and Ancestors have been brought into existence by the collective efforts of novices, they are beyond the delusions that snare and entrap novices, and even if they are brought into existence by the springing up of myriad helpful laity, they are beyond the delusions that snare and entrap lay folk. The underlying principle of this is that water is water as a result of its bringing together a varied assembly, and clouds, in turn, are clouds as a result of their bringing together a varied assembly.<sup>4</sup> What brings together clouds are 'clouds' and what brings together water are 'waters'. A monk's bowl is one that is simply composed by a varied assembly, a bowl that is simply composed of all their hearts, a bowl that is simply composed of Emptiness, a bowl that is simply composed of monks' bowls. A monk's bowl is restricted by 'a monk's bowl'; a monk's bowl is tainted by 'a monk's bowl'.<sup>5</sup>

The monk's bowl that novices now receive is the monk's bowl that the Four Guardian Kings offered to the Buddha. If the monk's bowl were not that which the Four Guardian Kings offered, it would not be the one that appears right before our eyes. The monk's bowl that has now been genuinely Transmitted everywhere by the Buddha's Ancestors who have received the Buddha's Treasure House of the

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4. There is a word play here that is lost in translation. Novices were known as *unsui*, literally 'water and clouds', because they would flow like water or drift about like clouds, going from monastery to monastery in search of the teacher they would come to regard as their Master. Coming into a monastery—particularly during the summer retreat period—they would bring their assembled talents into action by taking up collective projects, such as making bowl sets and monastic robes.
  5. That is, if we think in terms of something called 'a monk's bowl', we tend to limit its meaning to its most literal sense.

Eye of the True Teaching is the monk's bowl that is beyond past and present. As a consequence, now that we have spotted, and broken free from, the old views held onto by men of iron will, we no longer need to be wedded to the opinion that this monk's bowl of ours is simply something made of wood. And we have gone beyond the view that it is something constructed from the bits and pieces that our sense organs pick up. And it does not hinder the mind that distinguishes rocks from jewels. Do not speak of it as being of jade or of tile.<sup>6</sup> Do not speak of it as being but a bit of carved wood. By not speaking thus, we affirm what a monk's bowl really is.

*Given to the assembly at Daibutsu-ji Temple in Echizen Province on the twelfth day of the third lunar month in the third year of the Kangen era (April 10, 1245).*

*Copied by me in the office of the Abbot's assistant at Daibutsu-ji Temple on the twenty-seventh day of the seventh lunar month in the third year of the Kangen era (August 20, 1245).*

*Ejō*

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6. 'Jade and tile' is a metaphor for what is polishable and what is not polishable.