

The Bodhi Seal of the Patriarch



The Venerable Sanghanandi

The 17th Patriarch from Shakyamuni Buddha

This Patriarch is the seventeenth in succession in India to transmit the Mind Seal Dharma. His name is Sanghanandi. THE VENERABLE ONE WAS BORN IN SHRAVASTI WHERE HE WAS THE CROWN PRINCE. The king of that province had a son but WHEN HE WAS SEVEN YEARS OLD HE GREW TIRED OF WORLDLY PLEASURES AND ASKED TO LEAVE THE HOME LIFE. Why didn't he enjoy the pleasures of the palace? You can think about it yourself and figure it out. It's because his good roots were deep and thick. He wasn't like most ordinary people who are totally upside down. Most people just get taken for a ride--tossed by the waves and pushed by the surf--in the bitter sea of birth and death. They keep bobbing up and down in that treacherous water and don't even

want to get out of it. But this child grew weary of such worldly pursuits at a very early age. He kept begging his father the king to let him leave home. Because of the way he was, he always liked to sit in meditation. From the age of seven he took up the practice of sitting in full lotus and could do it for a day or two at one sitting.

ONE EVENING HE WENT TO A LARGE ROCK CAVE in the vicinity of the Capital City AND SAT DOWN TO MEDITATE. He was all by himself. THE SIXTEENTH PATRIARCH CAME ALONG, HOWEVER, AND SAW HIM SITTING QUIETLY THERE. The Patriarch Rahulata saw the Venerable Sanghanandi sitting there in meditation. THE PATRIARCH WAITED--THREE WEEKS. When the Patriarch saw him sitting there, he decided to wait for him to come out of samadhi. He ended up waiting for twenty-one days! It was that long BEFORE THE CHILD CAME OUT OF SAMADHI.

THE PATRIARCH ASKED HIM, "IS IT YOUR BODY THAT'S IN SAMADHI OR IS IT YOUR MIND THAT'S IN SAMADHI? Seeing that he was capable of sitting for twenty-one days, the Patriarch put a question to him. He said, "When you were sitting there, was it your body that had entered samadhi or was it your mind that had entered samadhi?"

THE ANSWER WAS, "MY BODY AND MIND WERE BOTH IN SAMADHI." Sanghanandi replied that in samadhi, both his body and his mind experience it. His answer was very reasonable, but the Sixteenth Patriarch wanted to continue the discussion--he wanted to point out his faults to him--so he said, "IF THE MIND AND BODY ARE BOTH IN SAMADHI, THEN HOW CAN THERE BE AN ENTERING AND A LEAVING?" His next question was tougher. "If your mind and body are both in samadhi then they would be in samadhi at all times-- there shouldn't be any going into samadhi or any coming out of samadhi."

HE REPLIED, "ALTHOUGH THERE IS ENTERING AND LEAVING, THE APPEARANCE OF SAMADHI IS NOT LOST." Although I go through the motions of entering and leaving samadhi, I haven't lost the experience of being in samadhi. When I 'come out' it's the same as if I were still 'in.'"

THE PATRIARCH PURSUED THIS. He said, "Well, if you don't lose the appearance of samadhi, then give me a look at the appearance of samadhi. What's it look like, anyway?" THE VENERABLE ONE SUDDENLY BECAME ENLIGHTENED. After such appropriate questioning, the Venerable Sanghanandi woke up. He understood that

All dharmas are basically pure of themselves.

All great samadhis are basically not entered or left.

THEN HE SOUGHT TO BE TAKEN ACROSS AND LIBERATED. He beseeched the Sixteenth Patriarch to shave his head and allow him to leave the home-life.

THE PATRIARCH USED HIS RIGHT HAND TO LIFT A BOWL UP TO THE BRAHMA PALACES TO GET SOME SUMPTUOUS FOOD. He raised the bowl clear up to the Palace of the Great Brahma Heaven King and brought back some heavenly delicacies so the two of them could have a little something to eat. "Eat up," he told the Master, "You've been sitting for so many days, I'll make this offering to you. We'll share in this heavenly repast." The Venerable One was also endowed with spiritual penetrations by that time, so THE VENERABLE ONE ALSO USED HIS RIGHT HAND TO ENTER THE REACHES OF THE VAJRA WHEEL--he went straight down into the depths of the

earth-- AND BROUGHT BACK SOME SWEET DEW WATER IN A CRYSTAL VESSEL. They'd probably finished eating by that time so then the two of them drank some sweet dew.

THE PATRIARCH TRANSMITTED THE GREAT DHARMA TO HIM. AFTERWARDS, HE WENT TO MAGADHA WHERE HE MET GAYASHATA. He in turn transmitted the Dharma to this Venerable One. Then, when the time came, the Venerable Sanghanandi went to Nirvana. But he did it in a special way. HE GRABBED A BRANCH OF A TREE WITH HIS RIGHT HAND AND ENTERED THE STILLNESS WHILE SWINGING THERE. He didn't have any sickness, he just went off to rebirth. Pretty free and at ease, wouldn't you say? That's really being liberated.

A VERSE IN HIS PRAISE SAYS:

SUDDENLY HE MET A KNOWING ONE AND BROKE THROUGH
HIS LONG-STANDING ATTACHMENT.
THIS IS LIKE KING SALA WHO CAUGHT THE THIEF
REDHANDED.
SMASHING THROUGH THE VESSEL, A RIVER OF GOLD
FLOWED FORTH LIKE THE SEA.

Originally he should have been the emperor but he didn't do that. Rather, he went into a cold rock cave and sat down to meditate. Once he was questioned by the Sixteenth Patriarch, he broke through his old attachment. Once that happened, he was able to receive and transmit the Buddhadharma. The "River of Gold" refers to the Dharma, which continues to grow as it is transmitted.

ANOTHER VERSE IN HIS PRAISE SAYS:

AT SEVEN YEARS HE DESPISED THE WORLD AND WANTED
TO LEAVE HOME.
CULTIVATING SAMADHI IN A CAVE, HE RENOUNCED GLORY
AND HONOR.
BASICALLY THERE ISN'T ANY APPEARANCE, IT'S APART
FROM THE SPOKEN WORD.
HOW MUCH LESS IS THERE NEED FOR A LOT OF TALK THAT
FALLS INTO TWO'S AND THREE'S.
THE TEACHER AND DISCIPLE WERE UNITED IN THE WAY--ON
THE SAME ROAD.
THE FLOWERS OF THE CAUSES AND THE FRUITS OF THE
EFFECTS ARE OF A THOUSAND VARIETIES.
TO MEET SOMEONE WHO KNOWS ONE'S SOUND IS
DIFFICULT, FOR HUMANE ONES ARE RARE.
THE LAMP OF THE MIND CONTINUES FOREVER,
TRANSMITTED FROM PAST TO PRESENT.

He didn't like any of the pleasures that the world had to offer. The only thing he enjoyed was the thought that he might leave home and cultivate the Way. When he entered samadhi in the cave, he was not arrogant nor did he feel that he was better than anyone else. Think about it, he was the crown

prince and he did not revel in the pleasures of the palace life. He could put absolutely everything down. He saw through it all and yet was not haughty or boastful. He simply did not have an attitude that sought glory or fame. All he did was cultivate.

In cultivation you have to sweep away all dharmas and leave all appearances. You have to break through all attachments. If there's a bit of an appearance remaining, it's going to cause trouble. They are only figures of speech which are not the real thing. There's no place for putting a head on top of a head. There's no need for useless prattle that falls into second and third meanings. The number one primary truth is already sufficient, why get involved in seconds and thirds? When you understand the genuine Dharma it is apart from the spoken word, from conceptualized thought, and from the written word. If you can't leave all appearances then no matter how much you cultivate, you are just skimming around on the surface of things.

When the causes are excellent, the fruit will be superb. But each person's cultivation is different. They plant different causes and reap different effects. It is rare to find a situation in which the Teacher and a disciple really understand one another. It's a difficult thing to have happened. That's because people who truly cultivate and who practice humaneness and propriety are rare indeed. And yet, generation after generation, the Mind Seal Dharma Door is transmitted. Shakyamuni Buddha transmitted it first. Now we have reached the transmission to the Seventeenth Patriarch. And the same transmission continues down to the present day.