

## *The Bodhi seal of the Patriarchs*



### *The Eighteenth Indian Patriarch Venerable Gayashata of Magadha*

THE VENERABLE ONE WAS FROM MAGADHA. WHEN THE SEVENTEENTH PATRIARCH REACHED THAT COUNTRY HE SAW A PURE YOUTH HOLDING A MIRROR. THE YOUNG MAN APPROACHED THE PATRIARCH.

"HOW OLD ARE YOU?" THE PATRIARCH ASKED.

"A HUNDRED YEARS."

"YOU'RE STILL A YOUNGSTER, WHY DO YOU SAY YOU'RE A HUNDRED YEARS OLD?"

THE YOUTH REPLIED, "I DON'T UNDERSTAND TRUE PRINCIPLE, SO I MAY AS WELL BE A HUNDRED."

"YOUR POTENTIAL IS EXCELLENT," NOTED THE PATRIARCH.

THE YOUTH CONTINUED, "THE BUDDHA SAID, 'IF A PERSON LIVES TO BE A HUNDRED BUT HAS NOT UNDERSTOOD THE BUDDHA'S PRINCIPLES, HE MAY AS WELL HAVE LIVED BUT A SINGLE DAY AND DIED.'" Confucius said, "If I hear of the Way in the morning, then it's all right if I die that night."

THEN THE WIND BLEW AND THE TEMPLE BELL SOUNDED. THE PATRIARCH ASKED, "DOES THE BELL RING OR DOES THE WIND RING?"

THE VENERABLE ONE REPLIED, "NEITHER THE WIND NOR THE BELL RING; MY MIND RINGS." This is reminiscent of the account in the *Sixth Patriarch's Sutra*:

*Two bhikshus, were discussing the topic of the wind and a flag. One said, "The wind is moving." The other said, "The flag is moving." They argued incessantly. Hui Neng (the Sixth Patriarch) stepped forward and said, "The wind is not moving, nor is the flag. Your minds, Kind Sirs, are moving." Everyone was startled.*

THE PATRIARCH SAID, "AND WHAT IS THE MIND?" Whose mind?

"COMPLETE STILLNESS," CAME THE ANSWER. THE PATRIARCH PRAISED HIM SAYING, "GOOD INDEED, GOOD INDEED," AND TRANSMITTED TO HIM THE GREAT DHARMA. He gave him the Proper Dharma Eye Treasury, the transmission outside the teaching which is not established in words or language. AFTERWARD THE VENERABLE ONE MET KUMARATA AND ASCENDED INTO SPACE WHERE HE DISPLAYED THE EIGHTEEN TRANSFORMATIONS, ENTERED THE FIRE-LIGHT SAMADHI, AND CREMATED HIS OWN BODY.

A VERSE IN HIS PRAISE SAYS:

HE CAME HOLDING A MIRROR  
AND BROKE THROUGH VERY WELL.  
"IT'S NOT WIND OR BELL THAT RINGS,"  
SAID HE, CLEARING THAT ERROR.  
AND THE BUDDHA'S POTENTIAL,  
NOT KNOWING WHAT IT IS,  
YET WEARING THE SANGATI,  
IS TO SULLY THAT CLOTH.

ANOTHER VERSE IN HIS PRAISE SAYS:

FOR EVERY YEAR ONE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND, ONE MAY  
AS WELL BE A HUNDRED,  
FOR THE TIME GOES BY IN VAIN THE DAYS AND MONTHS  
IN A VACUUM.  
NOT THE WIND, NOT THE BELL, BUT RATHER IT'S MY MIND  
THAT MOVES.  
AS IS THE PRINCIPLE, SO ARE THE POTENTIALS. FIND OUT  
FOR YOURSELF.

STILLING AND QUIETING ALL CREATION THERE'S NO  
PLACE TO DWELL.  
VAST, GREAT AND INFINITELY SUBTLE, WHAT PROBLEM  
IS THERE?  
COMING AND GOING ONE IS LIBERATED APART FROM ALL  
HINDRANCES.  
BIRTH AND DEATH AND TRUE SUCHNESS ARE EVEN MORE  
NOT GRASPED AT.

Basically, Patriarchs don't need to be praised. But because we descendents revere their Way virtue and their awesome practices, we attempt to express our praise in simple unembellished verses. Maybe when the Patriarchs hear it they won't like it, but we are so moved by their example that we can't avoid saying a little something by way of sincerely expressing our respect.

Why did the child say he was a hundred years old? He wasn't just joking around. He deeply felt that as long as he did not understand the Buddhas' Mind Seal Dharma-door, that he may as well be an old man on the brink of death. He knew what he said was unbelievable, being only a child and professing to be so old, but he wanted to represent that he had not yet genuinely understood the Buddhadharma. His meaning was that he'd lost time already. He still hadn't gotten where he knew he ought to be. All he'd been doing was eating, sleeping, and wearing clothes. He hadn't amassed any merit or virtue. He'd been too idle and remiss. That was the message he was trying to get across.