

# *Bodhi Seal of the Patriarchs*

*by Venerable Master Hua  
translated by Bhikshuni Heng Ch'ih*



## *The Twenty-First Patriarch The Venerable Vasubandhu*

THE VENERABLE ONE WAS A NATIVE OF THE CITY OF RAJAGRIHA. HE ATE ONLY ONE MEAL A DAY AND NEVER LAY DOWN TO SLEEP. IN THE SIX PERIODS OF THE DAY AND NIGHT HE BOWED TO THE BUDDHAS. THE ASSEMBLY TOOK REFUGE WITH HIM. THE TWENTIETH PATRIARCH, the Venerable Jayata, CAME TO WHERE HE WAS AND ASKED THE ASSEMBLY, "CAN THIS ASCETIC ATTAIN THE BUDDHA WAY THROUGH CULTIVATION OF BRAHMA CONDUCT?"

THE ASSEMBLY REPLIED, "OUR TEACHER IS SO VIGOROUS, HOW COULD HE FAIL TO?"

THE PATRIARCH SAID, "YOUR TEACHER IS FAR FROM THE WAY."

THE ASSEMBLY ASKED, "WHAT VIRTUOUS CONDUCT HAS THE VENERABLE ONE AMASSED THAT HE RIDICULES OUR TEACHER?"

THE PATRIARCH, REPLIED, "I NEITHER SEEK THE WAY NOR AM I UPSIDE DOWN. I NEITHER BOW TO THE BUDDHA NOR DESPISE HIM. I NEITHER SIT FOR LONG PERIODS NOR AM I LAZY. I NEITHER EAT ONLY ONCE A DAY, NOR EAT AT RANDOM. THE MIND NOT HOPING FOR ANYTHING IS CALLED THE WAY."

We must remember, however, that the person speaking was the Twentieth generational Patriarch. He was capable of speaking like this. There are people who try to pass themselves off as patriarchs by learning to rattle "head-mouth zen." Don't be one who makes this mistake. You have to be up to that status to be able to talk like that. The Twentieth Patriarch received the Buddha's Transmission. He was qualified to talk like this. If one has not received the Orthodox Transmission one cannot speak in this way.

The Venerable Vasubandhu had long been an ascetic and practiced taking only one meal at noon and never lying down to sleep. Some people who don't know what they're talking about and who've certainly never tried it, insist that "never lying down" means "never sleeping." Come on now, people are just people. Everyone needs to eat, sleep, and wear clothes. "Never lying down" means just what it says. It does not stipulate whether one is awake or asleep when sitting. That's like the criticism of the Venerable Elder Kuang Ch'in that someone tried to pass off on me recently. They took me aside and whispered, "Do you know. He eats *rice gruel!*" as if that were a criminal offense or something. "The Elder Master *should* eat rice gruel," I replied. "He's over ninety and needs nourishment. Just because he spent most of his life eating only fruit and nuts doesn't mean he can't decide to do something else if he wants to. There's no precept against eating rice gruel, for goodness sake. It was his own vow to cultivate the ascetic practice of eating only fruit and nuts and after all these years he has certainly fulfilled the vow and is entitled to do as he sees fit." But there are always those who are quick to criticize, even when they don't know what they're talking about, and despite the fact that they've never tried it themselves.

WHEN THE VENERABLE ONE HEARD THAT--when he heard the Patriarch's leveling of opposites--HE BROUGHT FORTH NON-OUTFLOW WISDOM. THE PATRIARCH THEN TRANSMITTED THE DHARMA TO HIM. AFTERWARDS HE WENT TO THE COUNTRY OF MAGADHA WHERE HE MET MANORHITA. HE THEN MADE HIS BODY RISE TO A HEIGHT OF HALF A YOJANA AND SETTLED AS IF ON A MOUNTAIN PEAK. THE FOUR FOLD ASSEMBLY GAZED UP AT HIM AND BEGGED HIM TO RETURN. They saw their teacher hovering far above them in a colossal body and they wanted him to come back and be with them. So they gazed up and pleaded with him to return to his original size and come down among them again. The master complied with their wishes, but once he came back down HE SAT IN FULL LOTUS AND DEPARTED.

A VERSE IN HIS PRAISE SAYS:

HIS NON-OUTFLOW WISDOM PENETRATED  
THE DAY-TO-DAY CONVERSATIONS IN A DREAM.  
THERE IS JADE HIDDEN IN THE THORNY MOUNTAINS.  
YOU'LL FIND PEARLS ENCASED IN AGED OYSTERS.  
THE LIGHT PIERCED THROUGH REPEATEDLY,  
THE WORTHY ONE TOOK IT IN STRIDE.  
TAKING UP THE LAMP OF WISDOM  
HE STARTLED THE HEAVENS AND SHOOK THE EARTH.

Possessed of Non-outflow Wisdom, he realized that there's not a word that can be said. But most people like to indulge in dream-talk. The "jade in the mountain" and the "pearl in the oyster" refer to his cutting off of desire. Although the Venerable Vasubandhu had been an ascetic cultivator for a long time, he didn't penetrate through to the light until he heard the words of the Twentieth Patriarch. Once awakened, he became a moving force in Buddhism whose influence is felt to this very day and will be known for generations to come.

ANOTHER VERSE IN HIS PRAISE SAYS:

ONE MEAL AND NEVER LYING DOWN--  
HIS WAS TRUE VIGOR.  
TEN THOUSAND THOUGHTS ALL EMPTY MADE  
HIM A GREAT GUIDING MASTER.  
"I DO NOT SEEK TO CAST ASIDE BEING  
UPSIDE DOWN.  
YOU SHOULD BREAK ATTACHMENTS AND  
BE APART FROM CRAZY PRIDE."  
HE DILIGENTLY CULTIVATED NON-OUTFLOW  
WISDOM OF THE MODES OF THE WAY.  
TO GET RID OF THE CONDITIONED IS  
TRANSCENDENT MERIT AND VIRTUE.  
JUST THIS IS THE MIND SEAL  
TRANSMITTING THE PATRIARCHS' INTENT  
MAY IT GROW EVER MORE LOFTY IN  
THE EAST AND IN THE WEST.

He was a vigorous ascetic, but the Twentieth Patriarch warned him not to get arrogant about it or become attached to dharmas. One should always be humble and possess the attitude that others are better than oneself. If you become arrogant, you will take a big loss. All your merit and virtue will be wiped out. You should think of yourself as the last one, the smallest.

The Venerable One realized that the ten thousand thoughts are all empty. That just means,

When one thought does not arise,  
the entire substance manifests.  
When the six sense organs suddenly  
move, one is covered by clouds.

If you still can say "I am empty" then you're not really. If you were, how could you say that? The very fact that you claim to be just shows that you still have that thought of being empty left.

The Twentieth Patriarch warned him not to be attached to his merit and virtue when he said, "I neither eat once a day nor eat at random." However, not being attached doesn't

mean that you can take eight meals a day and claim that it's okay because you're not attached. It means you cultivate according to the rules but you do it as if nothing were going on. You,

Sweep away all dharmas and leave  
all appearances.

One who can see all appearances and yet be apart from all appearances, realizes Bodhi.