

The Seal of the Patriarch



THE FIRST PATRIARCH, VENERABLE MAHAKASHYAPA

BY VENERABLE MASTER HUA

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The Venerable Mahakashyapa is still in the world. He is in Yunnan, China, at Chi Tsu (Chicken Foot) Mountain in samadhi. He is waiting for the Venerable Maitreya, the next Buddha, to come into the world and accomplish Buddhahood. Then he will take the golden threaded samghati robe and transfer it to that Buddha. That is because the robe is transmitted from Buddha to Buddha. The Venerable Mahakashyapa has been in samadhi for almost three thousand years already.

THE VENERABLE ONE WAS FROM MAGADHA, a Country in old India. HE WAS A BRAHMAN. There are four major castes in India, and he belonged to the Brahman caste. HIS BODY WAS GOLDEN COLORED. Why was that? In the past when he was a poor person, he gilded a Buddha image. As a result, he has been endowed with a golden body in life after life. WHEN HE MET THE BUDDHA, HE LEFT THE HOME-LIFE. Originally Mahakashyapa was an elder in an externalist sect. He lead a large following of disciples in that cultivating. But once he met the Buddha, he realized he was inadequate.

By that time he was over a hundred and twenty years old, but he bowed to the Buddha as his teacher. IT WAS HIS WISH TO TAKE ALL BEINGS ACROSS. THE BUDDHA REFERRED TO HIM AS FOREMOST IN THE ASSEMBLY. He said Mahakashyapa was first among the great disciples.

ONE DAY AT THE ASSEMBLY ON VULTURE PEAK, THE BUDDHA TWIRLED A GOLDEN-COLORED UTPALA FLOWER, SHOWING IT TO ALL IN THE GREAT ASSEMBLY, WHO REMAINED SILENT. None of them could figure out what was going on. So they didn't know what to say. ONLY THE VENERABLE ONE, Mahakashyapa, BROKE INTO A SUBTLE SMILE. The Venerable Mahakashyapa was very decorous and solemn, but he gave a little laugh. As soon as he smiled, THE BUDDHA SAID, "I HAVE THE PROPER DHARMA-EYE TREASURY, THE WONDERFUL MIND OF NIRVANA--non-production and non-extinction--THE ACTUAL MARK WITHOUT A MARK. You may try to say it has an appearance, but it is markless; however, if you say it is markless, still, it has an appearance. It is the actual mark which is without any mark and yet with nothing unmarked. That's THIS SUBTLE AND WONDERFUL DHARMA DOOR--this is inconceivable--WHICH DOES NOT ESTABLISH LANGUAGE. It cannot be expressed in words. IT IS A TRANSMISSION OUTSIDE THE TEACHING, WHICH I HAVE BEQUEATHED TO MAHAKASHYAPA. It is a transmission beyond what I taught you and I have already bestowed it upon Mahakashyapa." THEN HE TOOK THE GOLDEN-THREADED SAMGHATI ROBE AND SPOKE THIS INSTRUCTION: "TRANSMIT THIS TO 'COMPASSIONATE CLAN' WHEN HE COMES IN THE FUTURE." He meant, "Take this and protect it well. In the future you can transmit it to the Venerable Maitreya Buddha, whose name means 'Compassionate Clan.'"

THE VENERABLE ONE BOWED AND SAID, "I WILL RESPECTFULLY CARRY OUT THE BUDDHA'S INSTRUCTIONS. I will reverently conduct myself in accord with the teaching. I will protect this kashaya."

LATER, THE VENERABLE ONE TRANSMITTED THE DHARMA TO THE VENERABLE ANANDA. The Venerable Mahakashyapa entrusted the transmission of the Proper Dharma-Eye Seal-Treasury to the Venerable Ananda. THEN HE TOOK THE SAMGHATI, WENT TO CHI TSU "CHICKEN FOOT" MOUNTAIN, AND ENTERED SAMADHI. He took the samghati, the Kashaya, to Yunnan, China, and went into samadhi. THERE, HE WAITS FOR "COMPASSIONATE CLAN" TO ENTER THE WORLD. He is waiting for Maitreya Buddha.

A PRAISE SAYS:

HE BROKE INTO A SUBTLE SMILE.
OTHERS MISTAKE *T'I HU* FOR POISON.
WHERE IS THE GOLDEN-THREADED KASHAYA TO BE FOUND?
WHAT WAS TRANSMITTED, ANYWAY?
IT IS A MISCONCEPTION THAT GETS FURTHER MISCONSTRUED.
AND IT WILL BRING DISASTER TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

SINCE IT IS LIKE HAIRS ON A TORTOISE OR HORNS ON A RABBIT.

What got transmitted? Basically nothing at all. But one must go through the motions. Really there isn't any such thing, but living beings have that kind of attachment. So in order to deal with their attachment, this thing is transmitted. Basically there isn't anything at all. Descendents fight over the robe and bowl. It becomes a source of contention. Basically those who cultivate the Way are not supposed to fight. That is why the verse says that what gets passed on to future generations brings them misfortune and calamity. Those who truly understand this Dharma are rare. Since turtles don't have hair and rabbits don't have horns, what's really meant is, there's no one.

ANOTHER VERSE IN PRAISE SAYS:

A FLOWER TWIRLED ON VULTURE PEAK: THE TRANSMISSION
OF THE MIND SEAL.
A FACE BROKE INTO A SLIGHT SMILE: HE DIRECTLY
UNDERTOOK THE TASK.
THE DHARMA LAMP OF SUCCESSIVE PATRIARCHS ILLUMINES
WORLDS AS MANY AS GRAINS OF SAND.
THE WISDOM-LIFE OF THE ON-GOING SANGHA FILLS UP THE
GREAT THOUSAND REALM.
THE GOLDEN-HUED DHUTA CULTIVATOR SETS UP THE
KASHAYA BANNER.
THE HONORED BUDDHA MAITREYA WILL CONTINUE THE
SAGELY PROCESS
MAHAKASHYAPA'S CONTRIBUTION HAS GREAT PERMEATION.
EXHAUSTING BOUNDARIES OF THE FUTURE, HIS KINDNESS IS
BOUNDLESS.

Shakyamuni Buddha held up an utpala bloom. He didn't just casually pick up a flower. Buddhas all employ symbolic dharmas. He showed everyone the flower to see if they understood--but no one even suspected it was so inconceivable.

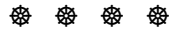
Only the Venerable Mahakashyapa smiled slightly, indicating he had inherited the responsibility--he understood.

Each Patriarch passes the robe and bowl on to the next, through the mind-to-mind seal Dharma successively transmitting the pulse of the Dharma so the Dharma lamp is not extinguished. Although the lamp light is small, it is transmitted to many places, and so it lights up as many worlds as there are grains of sand in the River Ganges. The wisdom-life of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha is perpetual and almost every country of this world has the Buddhadharma.

The "Golden Ascetic" Mahakashyapa, preserves the Kashaya and sets up the banner of Dharma for, in the future, the Venerable Maitreya will inherit that kashaya and become a Buddha.

The Honored Buddha Maitreya, who is next to descend and be born among us. will continue the work of the Sages, of Buddhas whose way is identical. "Process" may not be easy to understand. This could read "field" instead, indicating Maitreya Buddha will plant the field planted by Sages. Most people think that fields are on earth, but this refers to how there is a field--that is, the Buddhadharma--everywhere between heaven and earth.

Within Buddhism, Mahakashyapa has made the greatest contribution. No one can contest his position as number one, for the Buddha said with his golden mouth that he was his foremost disciple, due to his great achievement. If we Buddhist disciples tried to repay the debt of kindness we own Mahakashyapa, we would never be able to finish, for it has no bounds.



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