

Records of the Life of Dhyana Master Fa Yung of Nyou-tou Mountain

Master Fa-yung was born to a family named Wei in Yan-ling, Yun-jou District (Kiangsu Province). In his nineteenth year the Master made an exhaustive study of history and the five Confucian books. Later on he investigated the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* and gained a profound insight in regard to the actual emptiness of all conditioned objects.

One day the Master sighed and said that the way of Confucianism is concerned with merely worldly principles and is therefore inconclusive, falling short of the ultimate reality; whereas the transcendental insight of Prajna is the boat that can ferry us across the sea of birth and death and deliver us from mortality.

The Master retired to Mau-shan (Rush Mountain), where he had his head shaved and renounced worldly ways. He subsequently went to Nyou-tou Shan (Ox-head Mountain) where he lodged in a stone chamber on the cliff face north of Yu-chi Monastery. During his stay there, a hundred birds made an offering of wonderful flowers to the Master. They carried the flowers in their beaks. During the Jen-gwan reign of the Tang Dynasty, the Fourth Chan Patriarch, Dausyin, observed that mountain from a distance, sensing from its unusual atmosphere that a rare and eminent Master was residing there.

Thus prompted, the Patriarch went to make further inquiries. Arriving at the mountain, Master Dau-syin asked a monk at a local temple, "Is there a man of the Way in your midst?"

The monk replied, "Surely, all those who leave the home life to become monks are men of the Way?"

Not satisfied with that, however, the Patriarch asked, "But which one is the man of the Way?"

The monk had no further reply, but another monk spoke up and said, "About thirty miles from here, in the mountains, there is a monk that the people call 'lazy Yung.' When others approach him, he neither rises from his seat nor joins his hands to greet them in the customary manner. Is that not a man of the Way?"

Heeding the directions of the monk, the Patriarch went up the mountain. When he eventually arrived at his destination, he saw Master Fa-yung seated in meditation--a model of composure--disregarding his visitor's presence.

Master Dau-syin then asked, "What are you doing here?"

Master Fa-yung said, "I am contemplating the Mind."

Master Dau-syin said, "'Who' is it that contemplates? What is the object of contemplation?"

Master Fa-yung was unable to reply to the Patriarch's question, but rose from his seat and paid obeisance

to him, asking, "Most Virtuous One, where do you live?"

Master Dau-syin replied, "This poor monk never stays anywhere definite but just wanders east or west according to circumstances."

Master Fa-yung then asked: "Do you know the Master Dau-syin?"

"Why do you ask about him?" replied the Patriarch.

"Well," said Master Fa-yung, "I have admired his virtuous reputation for a long while and had hoped to pay him a courtesy visit sometime."

The Patriarch then said, "Dau-syin is my humble name."

Surprised at this, Master Fa-yung asked, "Why did you come here?"

"I came especially to find you," said Master Dau-syin. "Do you have a convenient place where I can rest?"

Master Fa-yung pointed to another little dwelling behind his stone chamber, offering to show it to his visitor. On the way to the hut, both Masters saw fierce tigers and wolves prowling about the lonely site. At that, Master Dau-syin flinched, raising his hands to his breast as if alarmed. Noticing his gesture, Master Fa-yung remarked, "I see that this is still with you!"

"What did you see just then?" inquired the Patriarch.

Master Fa-yung did not comment further. Shortly thereafter, when Master Fa-yung was not looking, Master Dau-syin slipped back to Master Fayung's abode and inscribed the character 'Buddha' upon the stone seat where Master Fa-yung usually sat in meditation. When Master Fa-yung later noticed it, he was somewhat startled by it, whereupon the Patriarch remarked, "I see that this is still with you!"

Master Fa-yung did not grasp the true import of Master Dau-syin's remark, but realizing that there was more to the Dharma for him to learn, he urged the Patriarch to explain the true essentials of the Dharma to him.

The Patriarch said, "All Dharma-doors lead to the Mind, from which wonderful powers emanate, countless as the Ganges' sands. All transcendental powers and their marvelous transformations realized through the practice of Precepts, Samadhi, and Wisdom are already complete in your own Mind and do not differ from it. All karmic barriers arising from afflictions are fundamentally empty and still. Every cause and effect is like a dream and an illusion. There is no triple realm' to leave; no Bodhi to seek. Both sentient and insentient phenomena are identical in spiritual reality. The great Way is empty and boundless, without desire or anxious graspings. Thus is the Dharma which you have now received. You are already lacking in nothing; how then do you differ from the Buddha? There is no other Dharma but that of letting go of the mind. You should not intentionally contemplate the Mind, nor should you try to purify it. Just refrain from giving rise to greedy and angry thoughts, harbor no anxieties

or fears. Just keep your mind easy and straightforward, free from obstructions; then you will move freely in any direction. Do not contrive good actions; refrain from bad actions. Whether you are walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, all that you happen to see and encounter is the Buddhas' wonderful function. From that comes joy and freedom from anxiety, and for this reason, it is expediently called 'Buddha.'

Master Fa-yung then asked Master Dau-syin, "As the Mind is held to be complete in itself, what is the 'Buddha' and what is meant by 'Mind' in connection with it?"

Master Dau-syin replied, "To cut off the mind, you need not inquire after a Buddha; to inquire after the Buddha, you need not cut off the mind.

Master Fa-yung asked, "Since you do not permit intentional contemplation, how should we respond when causes and conditions arise through our contact with things?"

In response to Fa-yung's question, Master Dau-syin said, "Causes and conditions are neither good nor bad in themselves, for such distinctions depend upon Mind. If you were not bent on forming conceptual distinctions, how could illusions arise? When falsehood no longer arises in the mind, the true Mind is free to know things in their suchness."

Master Dau-syin continued, "You should just accord with the Mind as it is and not keep trying to check it. If you can follow that, then you can realize the everlasting Dharma-body, which is free from change and transformation. I received the teaching of Sudden Enlightenment from the great Master Seng Tsan, which I am now transmitting to you. Please cherish and look after it. Be sure to stay here on this mountain, for later you will have five eminent successors to perpetuate the profound teaching."

After successfully transmitting the Dharma to Master Fa-yung, the Fourth Patriarch subsequently returned to Mount Shwang-feng where he spent the rest of his life. From there on, Master Fa-yung began his teaching, which prospered widely. During the Yunghwei Reign of the Tang Dynasty (650- 655), the monastic community suffered from a famine. Because of that, Master Fa-yung went on an alms tour, leaving the mountain for Dan-yang every morning, walking eighty miles, and returning in the evening carrying one picul and eight pecks of rice on his back. In that way the Master provided enough food for three hundred monks who would otherwise have missed their two daily meals.

In the third year of the Yung-hwei reign (653), the district magistrate, Syau Ywan-shan, invited the Master to expound on the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* at Jyan-ju Monastery. At that time a large assembly of monks gathered to hear the Master's sermon. When he reached the chapter on "Stillness and Quiescence," the earth shook and trembled. After expounding on the Sutra, Master Fa-yung returned to the Nyautou Mountain at Jin-ling.

In the first year of the Syan-ching Reign (656), District Magistrate Syau Ywan-shan invited the Master to leave Nyau-tou Mountain to reside at the Jyan-ju Monastery. As Master Fa-yung could not decline the request, he transmitted the "Dharma-seal" to Jryan, the Head Monk at Nyau-tou Mountain, instructing him to take over and hand down the Dharma to the junior monks. When he was about to leave the mountain, Master Fa-yung addressed his disciples, informing them that he would not be returning. At that time, birds and animals on the mountain wailed mournfully for over a month. In front of the monastery four large paulownia trees suddenly withered and died in mid-summer.

On the twenty-third day of the first lunar month of the following year (657), the Master passed away at Jyan-ju Monastery, then being in his sixty-fourth year, forty-one years after his ordination into the Sangha. On the twenty-seventh day of that month, the Master was buried on Mount Ji-lung. Over ten thousand people congregated at the Master's funeral. The Master's former residence at Nyou-tou, with the stone chamber where he meditated and various ponds and springs--Golden Spring, Tyu Spring, Tinstaff Spring, and Gold Turtle Spring--are all preserved to this day.

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