

The Bodhi Seal of the Patriarchs

by the Venerable Master Yun and the Venerable Master Hua

*Forty-third Generational Patriarch Dhyana Master Fa Deng
("Dharma Lamp") of Jinling*



This Patriarch belongs to the Fa Yen (Dharma Eye) Chan School. There are five Chan Schools in China, and they are compared to five petals emerging from a single flower. The Five Schools are:

1) Lin Ji; 2) Tsao Dung; 3) Yun Men; 4) Wei Yang; and 5) Fa Yen.

In Buddhism we have the saying:

The Lin Ji School filled half the sky.
The Tsao Dung had one corner.
Yun Men and Fa Yen had only a small following.

The Tsao Dung School had about one quarter of the entire Chan population, whereas Yun Men, Fa Yen and Wei Yang each had small followings. The Lin Ji School had the greatest following. That is because the Patriarchs of that school, one and all, had to undergo beatings. As a result, the offspring in that line are many. The other Chan schools did not have such large followings.

Dhyana Master Fa Deng (Dharma Lamp) of Jin Ling, present-day Nanjing, is the forty-third generational patriarch in the Fa Yen School. THE MASTER WAS A NATIVE OF WEI FU, in Henan Province. There are hidden dragons and crouching tigers in Henan. That place has all manner of people. FROM HIS BIRTH HE KNEW ABOUT THE WAY. Dharma Master Fa Deng had an impressive background. From the time he was born, he knew to cultivate the Way. He was born with knowledge, which means he was the most superior kind of person. It is said:

Those born with knowledge are superior.
Those who gain knowledge through study are less lofty.
Those who learn only under duress are more inferior.
Those who refuse to learn even under duress are the most inferior kind of people.

People who know to cultivate from the time they are born are sages or perhaps Bodhisattvas come again. They are blessed with superior faculties and keen wisdom. Those who gain knowledge after study are of a lesser calibre. And those who only study because they have endured hardships are an even lesser grade of people than the previous kind. Those who refuse to study even when they are in the midst of poverty and hardship are the lowest kind of people.

This Dhyana Master knew about the Way from the time he was born. AND he HAD UNIMPEDED ELOQUENCE. You should know where eloquence comes from. Why is it that some people are born intelligent, while others are born stupid? There are further two different kinds of intelligent people. The first kind of intelligent people are those who have deeply steeped themselves in prajna. They have recited Great Vehicle Sutras and investigated especially the prajna texts. Because they have deeply entered the Sutra treasury, they gain sealike wisdom. That is the wisdom derived from study of Buddhism. Not only are such people intelligent, they always walk on the straight and open path. Everything they do is upright, bright, and public. They are not the least bit casual or perfunctory. They never resort to any trick in order to gain fame or profit. Because they come from a proper path, their actions are proper. Such people act as models for others. Their intelligence is gained through a proper course.

There is another kind of intelligence that is gained through deviant paths. Such people are actually goblins, strange ghosts, and demons who have reincarnated in the world in human form. Such people may be essences such as li, mei, or wang-lyang ghosts, cow-ghosts or snake spirits, and so forth. They possess supernatural powers and a kind of ghostlike intelligence. You can't fool them in the least. They know everything. And yet, although they know everything, they do not do proper things. Instead, they engage in killing, arson, theft, and robbery, or other harmful acts that contradict heavenly principle. Everything they do injures others and is crooked. They walk on precarious paths and are always on the lookout for an opportunity. They do not tread a straightforward path. Instead they take side roads. For example, people who gamble and take dope are quite intelligent. Why do they walk such twisted paths? It is because their intelligence is used in cunning and sinister ways. That being their nature, although they know that wholesome deeds are good, they refuse to do good. Although they know that evil deeds are bad, they still engage in evil deeds. And so that's the difference between those who walk on proper paths and those who take deviant paths. Those who tread deviant paths are mostly mountain essences, water spirits, li, mei, and wang-lyang ghosts and other strange freaks. These strange creatures are also very intelligent. But don't assume that intelligent people are all alike. Not only are they not the same, there are actually thousands of variations in between. Because these people do not walk on proper paths, you can surmise they come from a shady background, and so they are prone to improper conduct. You can base your judgment on their background and the path they take.

Now, this Dhyana Master has unimpeded eloquence and proper knowledge and proper views. Because he has a good foundation in philosophy, he acquired unobstructed eloquence. Something may seem to appear unreasonable, but after he discusses it, he will shed light on the entire matter and make it reasonable.

HE WAS A ROOM-ENTERING DISCIPLE OF DHYANA MASTER FA YEN. He received the Dharma-transmission of the Fa Yen School. ONCE HE PRESIDED OVER THE DHARMA HALL AND DECLARED, he introduced himself this way, "MY ORIGINAL INTENT WAS TO LIVE IN THE MOUNTAINS AND HIDE MY LIGHT. I wanted to live in the mountains instead of staying in a busy city. I wanted to RECUPERATE FROM MY ILLNESS AS I PASS THE TIME. What kind of illness? The illness of my habits and faults. Recuperating from the illness means getting rid of one's faults. It does not mean one intensifies and nurtures the illness. Rather, it means one nourishes one's spirit and drives out the demon of sickness. That was the way I hoped to pass my time.

"I only wish to preserve my life during these troubled times,
But I do not wish to seek fame and wealth from the princes."

That was my aspiration. HOWEVER, MY TEACHER HAD SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS. I had no choice but to come out from the mountains. My teacher hadn't completed his work.

What kind of unfinished business was this? Dharma Master Fa Deng wished to fulfill his teacher's wishes. For instance, his teacher might have wanted to lecture on a certain Sutra but did not get to do it, and so now the disciple will lecture on it. Or, his teacher had wanted to do something, such as build a monastery, but did not manage to do it, and so now the disciple fulfills his master's wishes by building a monastery. I believe this "unfinished business" refers to the task of propagating the Buddhadharma. Because his teacher had not completely finished his job, Dharma Master Fa Deng said, "AND SO I HAVE COME OUT TO FINISH IT ON HIS BEHALF. Instead of staying in the mountains, I have not feared the trouble and have come out to the hub-bub of the city so as to bring to fulfillment my Master's wishes."

AT THAT TIME A MONK ASKED HIM, since Master Fa Deng did not give further explanation, a monk recklessly broached this subject, "WHAT WAS YOUR TEACHER'S UNFINISHED BUSINESS?"

THE MASTER HIT HIM. Without saying anything, without making any further elaborations, the Master simply hit the monk. Then HE SAID, "BECAUSE THE LIFE-PULSE OF THE PATRIARCHS HAS NOT BEEN CUT OFF, IT ENTAILS A LOT OF TROUBLE FOR THEIR SONS AND GRANDSONS. Because the pulse of the Patriarchs has not been severed, it added a lot of trouble and gave a lot of work to the generations to come afterwards."

THE MONK ASKED, "WHERE DOES THE MISTAKE LIE? Well, what's wrong with my question?" He could not understand the Master's reply to his question and proceeded to argue.

THE MASTER ANSWERED, "THE MISTAKE LIES IN MY GETTING YOU INVOLVED IN THIS TROUBLE. The mistake lies on my part, which is why I have hit you. It's right there: since I have hit you, I've been giving you trouble. The teacher hits his disciples. The Patriarch beats his followers. The mistake is with me, and I have given you trouble."

WHEN THE KING OF JYANG NAN HEARD ABOUT THIS, this rumor, HE ALSO ASKED THE MASTER, "WHAT WAS THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF YOUR TEACHER? What task did he leave uncompleted?"

This time the Master did not strike the king. He knew that if he hit a monk he would not be committing a crime deserving death. But if he hit the king, he might lose his head. And so he did not strike the king. THE MASTER REPLIED, "I AM RIGHT NOW IN THE PROCESS OF CLARIFYING THE ISSUE. That's what I am doing right now. Look at everything I do: they are all part of completing the unfinished business on my teacher's behalf. I am making things clear for all of you."

ANOTHER MONK ASKED. Maybe this monk wanted to show off before the king, and so he asked a question: "WHAT IS THE SECRET WITHIN THE SECRET INTENT THAT CAME FROM THE WEST? What is the secret meaning of the Path transmitted from India?"

THE MASTER Fa Deng ANSWERED, "SUFFERING! If you do not go through some intense suffering and hard work, you won't attain this meaning. You have to put down and renounce worldly honor, glory, wealth, lust, fame, and profit. And for people who don't understand, this is a lot of suffering."

But this monk still had not understood, and so he came up with another QUESTION: "WHAT IS THE GREAT INTENT OF THE BUDDHADHARMA? What is the general meaning of the Buddhadharma?"

THE MASTER CAME BACK WITH THIS RETORT, "FIRST, ASK ABOUT THE SMALL INTENT. First the monk asked about the secret intent, and then the great intent, and so the Master told him to look into the small intent. "If you understand the small meaning, you will also understand the great meaning. If you don't understand the small, how could you understand the great? If you understand the small intent, I will then let you know about the great intent." Actually this was a very practical and accurate answer. And so the Master concluded by saying, "First, ask about the small intent. THEN I WILL SHOW YOU THE GREAT INTENT."

A VERSE IN PRAISE SAYS:

ON THE TIGER'S NECK HUNG A GOLDEN BELL.
THE MASTER MANAGED TO FASTEN IT, AND IS ABLE
TO UNTIE IT, TOO.
THE HUNDRED JOINTS BELONG TO ONE BODY.
IN A CONTEST BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE, ONLY ONE
GETS THE TROPHY.
THE BUDDHADHARMA'S INTENT IS GREAT,
BUT THE WAY GETS IGNORED FOR THOUSANDS OF
YEARS.
THE LIFE-PULSE OF THE PATRIARCHS IS UNENDING.
CLARIFICATION IS GOING ON RIGHT NOW.

A VERSE IN PRAISE SAYS: ON THE TIGER'S NECK HUNG A GOLDEN BELL. THE MASTER MANAGED TO FASTEN IT, AND IS ABLE TO UNTIE IT, TOO. Dharma Master Fa Deng dares to fasten a golden bell onto the tiger's neck, and also dares to untie it. THE HUNDRED JOINTS BELONG TO ONE BODY. The human body consists of four limbs, a hundred joints, and is a combination of the four elements. Yet all of these belong to one substance. The Buddhadharma's great meaning is the same way: one root divides into a myriad branches; a myriad branches all return to one root. IN A CONTEST BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE, ONLY ONE GETS THE TROPHY. In a

competition between two people, only one will win and get the trophy. THE BUDDHADHARMA'S INTENT IS GREAT, BUT THE WAY GETS IGNORED FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. Because a lot of suffering is involved, there aren't many people who are truly intent on cultivation. Most people waste their time and look lightly on the Buddhadharma. And so for a thousand years, there haven't been many people who have had success. LIFE-PULSE OF THE PATRIARCHS IS UNENDING. The life-force of the Patriarchs, their robe and bowl, has not been cut off but is perpetuated to the present day. CLARIFICATION IS GOING ON RIGHT NOW. Everything we do now—propagating the Buddhadharma, teaching and transforming living beings, and so forth—are all part of the Buddhadharma's great intent, its secret intent.

ANOTHER VERSE SAYS:

FROM BIRTH HE KNEW ABOUT HIS PAST LIFE;
HE BELONGED TO THE FLOW OF SAGES.
UNIMPEDED ELOQUENCE CAME FROM CULTIVATION
OF PRAJNA.
LIVING IN THE MOUNTAINS AND HIDING HIS LIGHT,
HIS RESOLVE WAS TRANQUIL AND UNTAINTED.
ENTERING THE HALL, HE PROCLAIMED THE
TEACHINGS, AND PERPETUATED THE GRAND
SCHEME.
CLARIFYING UNFINISHED BUSINESS, THIS IS THE
MATTER AT HAND.
HAVING BEEN RELEASED FROM BONDAGE, HE
COMES HERE AGAIN IN HIS TRAVELS.
SONS AND GRANDSONS ARE CAUGHT UP IN THIS
MESSY BUSINESS;
IF YOU DO NOT RECOGNIZE YOUR TRUE SELF, YOU
WILL NEVER PUT TO REST WHAT SHOULD BE
PUT TO REST.

ANOTHER VERSE SAYS:

FROM BIRTH HE KNEW ABOUT HIS PAST LIFE. From birth he understood former causes and future effects. He knew what he was all about in the past.

If you wish to know your past causes,
It's what you are going through in this life.
If you wish to know your future results,
It's what you are doing in this life.

If you desire to know your past causes and conditions, just look at all your experiences in this life—they are the result of your past lives. If you desire to know about your future life, just take a look at what you are doing right now. If you do human things in this life, in the future you will be reborn as a human being. If you do animal-like things in this life, in the future you will be reborn as an animal. If you do ghost-like things in this life, in the future you will be reborn as a ghost. If you exclusively create offenses, in the future you will fall into the hells. The three periods of time are interrelated, mutually acting as cause and effect. The Master knew about his past life, and HE BELONGED TO THE FLOW OF SAGES. People like him have great good roots and are Bodhisattvas come again, the provisional appearance of great beings who have come to teach and transform living beings.

UNIMPEDED ELOQUENCE CAME FROM CULTIVATION OF PRAJNA. Because in the past he cultivated prajna wisdom, in this life he obtained unobstructed eloquence. However, there are those who come from the paths of goblins, ghosts, and demons who also possess unimpeded eloquence, but theirs is a kind of worldly knowledge and skill in debate. LIVING IN THE MOUNTAINS AND MASKING HIS LIGHT, HIS RESOLVE WAS TRANQUIL AND UNTAINTED. His original wish was to live in the mountains, hide his light, and cover his tracks. He was aloof from mundane matters and was not ambitious for fame or profit. But in order to complete his teacher's unfinished task, he entered society to propagate the Buddhadharmā.

ENTERING THE HALL, HE PROCLAIMED THE TEACHINGS, AND PERPETUATED THE GRAND SCHEME. He assumed a grand mission and responsibility. CLARIFYING UNFINISHED BUSINESS, THIS IS THE MATTER AT HAND. He said, "Right now I am clarifying the issue and completing the unfinished task." HAVING BEEN RELEASED FROM BONDAGE, HE COMES AGAIN IN HIS TRAVELS. He has already broken the fetters, but he comes again to the world to teach living beings. SONS AND GRANDSONS ARE CAUGHT UP IN THIS MESSY BUSINESS. Because the Patriarchs did not complete their tasks, they left a lot of unfinished business, many issues concerning rights and wrongs that give their descendents a lot of trouble. IF YOU DO NOT RECOGNIZE YOUR TRUE SELF, your basic Buddha-nature, YOU'LL NEVER PUT TO REST WHAT SHOULD BE PUT TO REST. Although you are supposed to take a rest, you don't rest. Although you should put a stop to all this, you don't stop. You keep on rising and falling, revolving in the six paths of rebirth.

Coming out of a horse's belly, you enter a cow's womb.
How many times have you come before King Yama's court?
Having just passed by Lord Shakra's palace,
You have plummeted into Yama's vat!

It is very dangerous to be revolving in the six paths of rebirth. However, most people intentionally deny cause and effect, saying, "Don't believe in the six paths of rebirth." Whether you believe or not, the six paths of rebirth in fact exist. But if you stubbornly refuse to accept the truth, you are stopping up your ears and stealing a bell, thinking no one else will be able to hear it ring either.

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