

The Bodhi Seal of the Patriarchs

by the Venerable Master Yun and the Venerable Master Hua

*42nd Patriarch Dhyana Master Sying Nyan
(Alert Mindfulness) of Shou Shan (Head Mountain)*



ESSAY:

THE MASTER WAS THE SON OF THE DI FAMILY OF LAI JOU. IN HIS OLD AGE, HE CAME TO MASTER FENG SYWE'S ASSEMBLY. FENG SYWE EXHORTED HIM TO SHOULDER THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GREAT DHARMA.

THE MASTER SAID, "I WISH TO HEAR ABOUT THE ESSENTIALS."

THEN FENG SYWE ASCENDED THE PLATFORM AND CITED THE OCCASION DURING WHICH THE WORLD HONORED ONE REGARDED THE GREAT ASSEMBLY WITH HIS BLUE LOTUS-LIKE EYES. THEN FENG SYWE SAID,

"RIGHT AT THAT TIME, WHAT WAS HE GOING TO SAY? IF YOU MAINTAIN THAT NOT SPEAKING WAS JUST SPEAKING, THEN YOU ARE BURYING THE INTENT OF THE FORMER SAGE. SPEAK UP—WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?"

THE MASTER SHOOK HIS SLEEVE AND LEFT.

MASTER FENG SYWE THREW DOWN HIS STAFF AND WENT BACK TO THE ABBOT'S QUARTERS. THE ATTENDANT MONK ASKED HIM, "WHY DIDN'T THE ONE WHO RECITES THE *DHARMA FLOWER* ANSWER THE VENERABLE MASTER'S QUESTION?"

FENG SYWE REPLIED, "THE ONE WHO RECITES THE *DHARMA FLOWER* ALREADY UNDERSTOOD. "

LATER, THE MASTER WENT TO LIVE AT MOUNT SHOU. DURING THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE CHUN HWA REIGN OF THE EMPEROR TAI JUNG OF THE SUNG DYNASTY (A.D. 93), AT NOON, ON THE FOURTH DAY OF THE TWELFTH MONTH, THE MASTER ASCENDED THE HALL AND SAID GOOD-BYE TO THE ASSEMBLY. HE SPOKE A VERSE, AND LEFT. AFTER THE CREMATION, THEY GATHERED TOGETHER HIS SHARIRA, AND BUILT A STUPA.

COMMENTARY:

The words of the Dhyana Master's name, "Syng-Nyan," mean always to reflect upon one's own thoughts, always to be aware of whether or not one has any false thinking. THE MASTER WAS THE SON OF THE DI FAMILY OF LAI JOU. The Master was from Lai Jou County of Shantung Province. His family name was Di. IN HIS OLD AGE, HE CAME TO MASTER FENG SYWE'S ASSEMBLY. In his old age, he lived at Dhyana Master Feng Sywe's place. FENG SYWE EXHORTED HIM TO SHOULDER THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GREAT DHARMA. Among those in the Dharma Assembly, Dhyana Master Feng Sywe thought highly of him, considering him a Dharma vessel to carry the Way. And so he encouraged Master Syng Nyan to put great effort into his cultivation, to become one of the Thus Come One's household. To shoulder the great Dharma means to undertake the responsibility for Buddhism as one's own personal task.

THE MASTER SAID, "I WISH TO HEAR ABOUT ITS ESSENTIALS." Dhyana Master Syng Nyan then responded, "I'd like to hear about how one takes on the responsibility for the lineage of the Thus Come One. How does one shoulder the great Dharma? You'll have to tell me."

THEN FENG SYWE ASCENDED THE PLATFORM. "Ascending the Platform" is a very important ritual in Buddhism. Whenever there is an important event, it is necessary to "ascend the platform" to speak the Dharma formally. Four attendants carry the censer, the whisk, the staff, and the tin staff in a magnificent procession. The drum is hit and the bells are rung in an impressive and solemn way. This is a most important ceremony in Buddhism.

At this point, Feng Sywe ascended the platform to speak the Dharma for the great assembly, AND CITED THE OCCASION DURING WHICH THE WORLD HONORED ONE REGARDED THE GREAT ASSEMBLY WITH HIS BLUE LOTUS-LIKE EYES. The Buddha once looked around, observing the great assembly with his blue lotus-like eyes. THEN FENG SYWE SAID, "RIGHT AT THAT TIME, WHAT WAS HE GOING TO SAY?" Feng Sywe said, "Right then, when he regarded the assembly with his blue-lotus eyes—think it over—what was the Buddha going to say? IF YOU MAINTAIN THAT NOT SPEAKING WAS JUST SPEAKING, THEN YOU ARE BURYING THE INTENT OF THE FORMER SAGE. If you insist that the Buddha was speaking the Dharma without words, not speaking yet speaking, then you are burying the intent of the former sage, the Buddha. If the Buddha hadn't spoken, nobody would have understood. SPEAK UP—WHAT WOULD YOU SAY? Think about it now, what did the Buddha want to say?"

THE MASTER SHOOK HIS SLEEVE, AND LEFT. Dhyana Master Sying Nyan swung his sleeve, and left without answering this question.

MASTER FENG SYWE THREW DOWN HIS STAFF AND WENT BACK TO THE ABBOT'S QUARTERS. At that time, Feng Sywe threw his staff on the ground and returned to the Abbot's quarters. THE ATTENDANT MONK ASKED HIM, "WHY DIDN'T THE ONE WHO RECITES THE *DHARMA FLOWER* ANSWER THE VENERABLE MASTER'S QUESTION?" The one who recites the *Dharma Flower Sutra* refers to Dhyana Master Sying Nyan. The attendant asked Feng Sywe, "Why didn't the one who recites the *Dharma Flower* answer your question? Why did he run away without saying anything?"

FENG SYWE REPLIED, "THE ONE WHO RECITES THE DHARMA FLOWER HAS ALREADY UNDERSTOOD." Feng Sywe answered, "Dharma Master Sying Nyan has already understood."

LATER, THE MASTER WENT TO LIVE AT SHOU MOUNTAIN. Later, Master Sying Nyan went to Shou Shan, "Head Mountain" (in the present Lin-Ru District of Henan Province), to be the Abbot there. DURING THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE CHUN HWA REIGN OF THE EMPEROR TAI JUNG OF THE SUNG DYNASTY, AT NOON, ON THE FOURTH DAY OF THE TWELFTH MONTH, THE MASTER ASCENDED THE HALL AND SAID GOOD-BYE TO THE ASSEMBLY. HE SPOKE A VERSE, AND LEFT, He told the assembly that he was about to leave, recited a verse, sat in full-lotus, and entered the stillness. AFTER THE CREMATION, THEY GATHERED HIS *SHARIRA*. After the cremation, many *sharira* were collected and they BUILT A jewelled STUPA. We have talked about *sharira* many times, however, there are still people who don't know how they are formed. If a cultivator can hold the precepts purely, without giving rise to any thought of sexual desire—that is to say, a man doesn't think about women, and a woman doesn't think about men—if one can guard one's own body as if it were a piece of fine jade and cultivate precepts, samadhi, and wisdom, then one will have *sharira*. However, if someone doesn't hold the precepts, doesn't cultivate samadhi and wisdom, then he will not have *sharira*. Therefore, *sharira* are proof that a cultivator held the precepts purely while alive.

Sharira is a Sanskrit word; it means "solid seeds". *Sharira* are very strong and hard. A Buddha's *sharira* are even harder than vajra, and can't be damaged by pounding, crushing, or smashing. Vajra is transformed from the essential spirit of the world's true cultivators. Why is vajra so rare? It's simply because there are very few true cultivators in the world. When something is rare, it becomes valuable and precious. Something that exists in large quantities is not valuable. If vajra were plentiful, then it would not be as valuable as it is.



In the Land of Ultimate Bliss, the earth is made of gold. People there treat gold in the same way we do dung and earth. They don't regard gold as something very wonderful. In our world, because gold is rare, people consider it to be a precious jewel, as they do diamonds and *sharira*. Not everyone has *sharira*. A cultivator must hold the precepts purely before he can have *sharira*. After the Dhyana Master was cremated, his disciples collected his *sharira* and built a stupa for them.

A VERSE IN PRAISE OF HIM SAYS:

HE SHOOK HIS SLEEVE AND WALKED AWAY;
ON A SINGLE SHOULDER HE BORE THE RESPONSIBILITY.
WITH SECRET FUNCTIONING AND SILENT PRACTICE,
THE AWL WAS HIDDEN IN THE SACK, AND NOT EXPOSED.
HE EMERGED UNIQUE AT MOUNT SHOU,
FLINGING WIDE OPEN THE DOOR. THE PHOENIX,
THE PHOENIX DANCING SPRIGHTLY AMONG THE CLOUDS.

COMMENTARY:

A VERSE IN PRAISE OF HIM SAYS: HE SHOOK HIS SLEEVE AND WALKED AWAY;/ Sometimes, when people feel disgruntled, they will shake their sleeves and walk away. However, in this case, the Master was not unhappy. Rather, he did it because he understood. Having understood, he felt there was no need to reply, and so he shook his sleeve and left.

ON A SINGLE SHOULDER, HE BORE THE RESPONSIBILITY./ He left because he already understood the Dharma-door of the mind-seal transmission. He understood the intention of the Thus Come One when he regarded the great assembly with his blue-lotus eyes. The purpose of that gesture was to call on everyone to take on the responsibility of the affairs of the Buddha's family. The Dhyana Master understood that he himself needed to assume that responsibility; therefore, as he brought forth this courage, he swung his sleeve unconsciously and walked away without saying anything. He made a vow: "I must undertake the responsibility of the Buddhadharma. Because I understand the Buddhadharma, it is my responsibility .

WITH SECRET FUNCTIONING AND SILENT PRACTICE / However, ordinary people do not understand this principle. He knew the secret function and realized he had

to propagate the Buddhadharma in an unobtrusive and imperceptible way. THE AWL WAS HIDDEN IN THE SACK, AND NOT EXPOSED./ An awl in a sack will be exposed sooner or later, but now it is hidden. This is what is called "concealing one's talent and retiring in obscurity"; the talent is concealed and not exposed. We people who are eager to show off what little intelligence or skill we may have are not like that. Students of martial arts sometimes like to show off some special skills they have learned. However, although he had talent, Dhyana Master Sying Nyan did not flaunt it or display it openly. He concealed his talent and waited for the right opportunity. He didn't show off to others and say, "I am such-and-such a wonderful person." He did not "let his awl be exposed." When it finally fell out of the sack, he was outstanding, far surpassing his peers.

A real cultivator doesn't casually reveal his true appearance--who he is. Ordinary people do not recognize him. It is not easy to understand him. What he does is totally different from others. He seems to be similar to others, in that he also sleeps, eats, and wears clothes. But his thoughts are completely different from others. What other people favor, he does not; what others are greedy for, he is not; what others are confused about, he is not. However, he wouldn't tell you, "I am such a wonderful person." That is the meaning of "the awl in the sack is not exposed."

HE EMERGED UNIQUE AT SHOU MOUNTAIN./ After Master Sying Nyan arrived at "Head Mountain," he extensively propagated the Buddhadharma. At that time, he began to startle heaven and move the earth by the unfurling of his aspirations.

FLINGING OPEN THE DOOR/—he opened his Dharma-door widely and caused the Buddhadharma to be roused. THE PHOENIX, THE PHOENIX/--he was like a phoenix, a rare and auspicious bird, DANCING SPRIGHTLY AMONG THE CLOUDS./ This refers to "sailing the clouds and riding the mist" with great ease. That is the state of an immortal. The Master had perfected the Eighteen Transformations of an Arhat. He was as if dancing on air.

ANOTHER VERSE IN PRAISE SAYS:

ALTHOUGH IT WAS DIFFICULT, HE CULTIVATED WITH STRENUOUS EFFORT.

HE SHOULDERS ALONE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FAMILY BUSINESS.

WISHING TO HEAR THE DHARMA'S ESSENTIALS, HE REQUESTED CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS.

HE WAS TAUGHT WITH THE SECRET INTENT OF THE BLUE LOTUS.

"WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?" HE SHOOK HIS SLEEVE AND GOT UP.

HIS TEACHER ENTRUSTED TO HIM HIS STAFF.

HE KNEW HIS OWN TIME, SAT IN FULL LOTUS, AND LEFT,

TRANSCENDING THE THREE REALMS AND ENTERING THE SAGELY FLOW.