

Menju (Face-to-face Transmission)

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1. Regarding the Expression “Face-to-face Transmission”

The term face-to-face transmission refers to master and disciple meeting face-to-face at which time the secrets of the Dharma are transmitted. In order for the master to better ascertain the character and credentials of his or her disciple and then on that basis to convey those secrets correctly, it is particularly necessary for the two to meet facing each other so that they can speak of these matters. Especially in the Zen sect, the Dharma has been passed down through the personal encounter between master and disciple.

“Intimately received from Shakyamuni Buddha and passed down through the successive generations by face-to-face transmission, to my teacher, the 37th generation.” [From *Zengen Shosenshutojo* written by Keiho Shumitsu]

In this way, the lineages within the Zen sect were emphasized and much value was placed on face-to-face transmission. Priding themselves in tracing their lineages back through the successive generations of ancestral masters all the way to Shakyamuni Buddha, this matter of face-to-face transmission was linked to the emphasis on their legitimacy. The correctly transmitted Buddha Dharma emphasized in Sotoshu is in line with this self-pride.

2. Regarding the Emphasis in the Sotoshu on Face-to-face Transmission

In the present day Sotoshu, transmitting the true Dharma from master to disciple (“Dharma transmission”) is defined in the following way.

“Dharma transmission” is defined as experiencing face-to-face transmission between master and disciple, receiving the Three Things, and realizing preservation of the Dharma Lamp.” [Sotoshu Regulations, Article 21: “Regulations Concerning the Ranks of Priests and Ranks of Kyoshi of the Sotoshu”]

The term “face-to-face transmission” appears in this quotation, but the meaning here is that it is necessary for master and disciple to meet face-to-face and that the Three Things are given by the master to the disciple. During the seven days needed to perform the Ceremony of Transmitting the Precepts and the Ceremony of Transmitting the Dharma, the Three Things that are passed from master to disciple in the abbot’s room are: the certificate of succession (*Shisho*), the Great Matter (*Daiji*), and the Blood-vein (*Kechimyaku*). At the same time, the transmission of the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye (*Shobogenzo*) is confirmed. It is by means of these activities that the disciple becomes one of the ancestral teachers who carry the Dharma Lamp passed on.

It should be noted that many prostrations are necessary in the actual ceremonial ritual which is part of the Dharma transmission ceremony. Even in the case when it isn't possible for the master to perform the ceremony due to his or her poor health, an exception can be made such that it is possible for only the disciple to make the prostrations. In that case, the disciple has to even go to the hospital where his or her master is staying. In short, the condition of face-to-face transmission has to be thoroughly worked out in the transmission ceremony.

The reason that it has come to be emphasized so thoroughly in this way is largely because of the "movement to restore the Sotoshu's authentic form of transmission" (the lineage-restoration movement) that took place during the Genroku years (1688-1704) of the Edo Period. The main proponents of this movement, Manzan Dohaku (1636-1715) and Baiho Jikushin (1633-1707) made the following claims.

"In the 'The Certificate of Succession' and 'Face-to face Transmission' chapter of Dogen Zenji's *Shobogenzo*, he clearly says that the Soto way of Dharma transmission is such that it is not permissible for a disciple to receive Dharma transmission from more than one master and furthermore, master and disciple must meet face-to-face." [Movement to restore the Sotoshu's authentic form of transmission]

It should be noted that the thing which Manzan and Baiho, who were in the same movement, criticized was the custom at that time in Sotoshu temples for the succeeding priest of a temple to inherit the temple through "temple-transmission." In this case, a priest who moved to a new temple transferred his lineage allegiance to the new temple and consequently he repeated Dharma transmission.

"However, we do witness at (Sotoshu) temples in all directions that true Dharma transmission is being lost, and priests are easily changing their masters depending on the temples. Moreover, I stroke my desk and sigh, 'The strictness of Dharma transmission has never surpassed Dogen Zenji and nevertheless it is less than 500 years since his death that evil thing as such have started.'" [From Manzan's preface to *Tomon Gekidan*]

The meaning of "priests are easily changing their masters depending on the temples" is like this. If, for example, a certain priest receives Dharma transmission from Priest A and then later, this priest has the opportunity to move to Temple B, when he enters Temple B as the new priest, the lineage of this temple is the one belonging to the priest who originally founded Temple B. Since the priest has Dharma transmission from Priest A, which is different from the lineage at Temple B, he then changes his Dharma lineage to Temple B. Also, in the case where the resident priest of Temple B is no longer living at the temple, the new priest might then go to the grave of the priest who founded the temple and make prostrations. This would then be considered as having received Dharma transmission in that lineage. Or, he might receive Dharma transmission from another priest who was in the same lineage as Temple B, in which case the second priest would stand in as the representative of the former resident priest. In the latter case, this from is referred to as a

“stand-in transmission (*Daifu*).”

In other words, Manzan’s and Baiho’s criticism was partly concerned with this form of “stand-in” transmission because it was not done “face-to-face.”

It should be noted that there was a clear example of this form of “stand-in” transmission which took place between Taiyo Kyogen (943-1027) and Toshi Gisei (1032-1083), two ancestral masters in the Chinese Soto lineage. Before his death, Taiyo was unable to find the disciple he was really looking for and so he gave his shoes and robes to Fuzan Hoon (991-1067), a Rinzai priest. He made a request to Fuzan such that if Fuzan found a monk suitable for the Dharma lineage of the Sotoshu, he should pass on his Dharma lineage to that monk. Later, Fuzan found Toshi and passed on to him Taiyo’s Dharma lineage. Since Fuzan stood in for Taiyo in transmitting that Dharma to Toshi, this form of transmission came to known as a “stand-in transmission.”

Dogen Zenji did not clearly deny or negate this case from China and Keizan Zenji in Chapter 44 of *The Transmission of Light* treated this example in a positive manner. Nevertheless, the movement to restore authentic Soto transmission which arose in the Edo Period renounced this “stand-in” form of transmission.

In particular, they objected to the case at Shoboji Temple in Iwate Prefecture where the founder of the temple, Mutei Ryosho (1313-1361), died without a disciple and subsequently was succeeded by a monk who should have been his younger brother disciple, Gessen Ryoin (1319-1400), when Gessen made prostrations to Mutei’s grave. Together with the incident mentioned above in China, this incident was said to be the cause of the disarray in Dharma transmission.

The result of this movement was that a Soto monk/priest can receive the certificate of succession (Dharma transmission) from only one master and that this transmission must be face-to-face. This remains the way it is done to the present day.

3. Dogen Zenji’s View of Face-to face Transmission

The way in which Dogen Zenji met his main teacher, Tendo Nyojo Zenji, is recounted in the following way.

“On the first day of the fifth month, of the first year of Hokyo in great Song, Dogen first offered incense to and made prostrations on the *Myokodai* to his late Master Tendo, the ancient buddha. The late Master, the ancient buddha, saw Dogen for the first time. Then, indicating face-to-face transmission, he said, ‘The Dharma gate of face-to-face transmission from buddha to buddha, from ancestral master to ancestral master, is now realized.’ This itself is holding up a flower on Vulture Peak. It is the attaining of marrow at Mt. Song. It is the transmission of the robe on Mt. Obai. It is the face-to-face transmission of Tozan (Mt. Dong). This is the face-to-face transmission of the buddha-ancestors’ treasure of the true Dharma eye. It is present only in our teaching. Other people have not even dreamed of it. [“Face-to-face Transmission” Chapter of the *Shobogenzo*]

On May 1st, 1225, Dogen Zenji offered incense and made prostrations to his teacher at Mt. Tendo.

At this time Nyojo Zenji said, “The Dharma Gate of the buddhas and ancestors has been realized.” This means that Dogen Zenji saw Nyojo Zenji face-to-face and Nyojo Zenji saw Dogen Zenji face-to-face. Since they both saw each other, the principle of face-to-face transmission was realized.

It should be noted that in Chinese Zen at that time, the premise in terms of the relationship between master and disciple was not that both master and disciple acknowledged that relationship, but rather that for the most part it was the disciple who chose (acknowledged) his or her master. In the modern-day Ceremony for Installing the Abbot, one part of that ceremony is called “Dharma-succession incense” is a ritual during which the new abbot reveals to everyone which Dharma lineage he or she has inherited. This custom remains from the way it was done long ago in China, with the exception that nowadays the custom is “Dharma transmission through face-to-face transmission” and for that reason a person’s Dharma lineage is already known before the “Dharma-succession incense” is offered.

Also, regarding the necessity of both master and disciple acknowledging that the Dharma has been transmitted, there is an important case that appears in the “Face-to-face Transmission” Chapter of the *Shobogenzo* where Dogen Zenji criticizes Sempuku Shoko, a Chinese priest of the Unmon sect. Sempuku Shoko had great enlightenment on reading the records of Unmon Bun-en. For that reason, he designated himself as one of Unmon’s heirs. Dogen Zenji criticizes Sempuku’s actions in the following way.

“Now, Sempuku, even if we admit that you know Great Master Unmon and have seen him, has Great Master Unmon seen you or not? If Great Master Unmon has not seen you, it isn’t possible for you to be Great Master Unmon’s Dharma heir. Because Great Master Unmon has not seen you and sanctioned you, you cannot claim that Great Master Unmon has seen you. It is evident that Great Master Unmon and you have never met each other.” [“Face-to-face Transmission” Chapter of the *Shobogenzo*]

Here, Dogen Zenji says that even if he were to acknowledge that Sempuku Shoko did clearly see Great Master Unmon’s understanding and realization, since Great Master Unmon never saw Sempuku, it isn’t possible to acknowledge that they met each other. In other words, Dogen Zenji clearly says that even if the disciple has clearly seen and realized the Dharma of his or her master, as long as the disciple isn’t acknowledged by the master, the face-to-face transmission of the Dharma gate is not realized.

In our modern day as well, it is not possible to permit the disarray of Dharma transmission and therefore, it is important that the basis of Dharma transmission is face-to-face transmission.

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