

CASE 64

Shishô's "Succession"



By Yamada Kôun

Instruction:

Shôyô¹ intimately encountered Bokushû, yet he burnt succession incense for old Seppô;

Tôsu personally received it from Enkan², yet he succeeded in the Dharma to Daiyô³.

Jade blossoms bloom upon the coral branches;

Gold fruit ripens in the forest of sandalwood.

Just tell me, how do such creations take place?

Case:

Head Monk Shishô⁴ asked Hôgen, "You have opened a zendo, Master. But who did you succeed to?" Hôgen said, "Master Jizô." Shishô said, "You have gone a great deal against your late master Chôkei."⁵ Hôgen said, "I still don't understand a turning word of Chôkei's." Shishô said, "Why didn't you ask me?" Hôgen said, "'The one body manifests itself in myriad phenomena' - what does it mean?" Shishô stuck up his whisk. Hôgen said, "That is what you learned under Chôkei. What is your own view, Head Monk?" Shishô was silent. Hôgen said, "When it is said, 'The one body manifests itself in myriad phenomena' - are the myriad phenomena swept away or are they not?" Shishô said, "Not swept away." Hôgen said, "There are two." All the disciples on the right and the left side said, "Swept away." Hôgen said, "The one body manifests itself in myriad phenomena - Nii⁶!"

Verse:

Away from thoughts, you see the Buddha,

¹ I.e., Unmon.

² A master in the Rinzai line.

³ A master in the Soto tradition.

⁴ Shishô was a disciple of Master Chôkei.

⁵ Hôgen once practiced under Master Chôkei.

⁶ A word used to directly point out something - "There!"

Breaking through the dust, you draw out the Sutra.
The family Dharma is right here and now:
Who should establish the [facilities] of the gate⁷ at all?
The moon follows the boat, flowing into the river of silken purity,
The spring comes with the grass, pervading the [fresh] green in the burnt field.
Swept away? Not swept away? – Listen with utmost care!
The three paths⁸ are desolate, yet one was able to return;
The old pines and chrysanthemums are still balmy and fragrant.

On the Instruction:

This is quite an interesting koan. Leaving the matter of content aside, there is this whole story line which is interesting. Here we have a monk who first practiced under a particular master and realized kensho, but did not become a dharma successor of that teacher. Instead he went to another teacher where he had a final decisive experience and then inherited the dharma of another master, and not that of his initial master. This koan is teaching us that such a thing is definitely not rare. If we look at the present state of affairs in Zen, we often have a case where a young acolyte goes to a temple and becomes a student of a certain master, receives tonsure and the precepts. He is then considered to be a monk in good standing who is referred to as “so-and-so Jōza,” where the word Jōza means a senior monk. That means monks who have barely arrived at the temple are already considered monks in good standing. You simply have to go through a standardized formal ceremony to become the student of a master. Most of the monks do not practice under the master of that temple. They go to the main temple to practice. Especially in recent times, this has become the mainstream. That’s because the abbot of a temple is, in almost all cases, not the teacher of the monk. That means he cannot bring the monk to kensho and on to perfect enlightenment so that the student can finish koan study under him. So the monk goes somewhere else to practice. In the case of Yasutani Roshi, the master at whose temple he first received tonsure and became a monk is known as the main teacher (honshi), in the sense of being the master in the bloodline of dharma succession. Actually, however, Yasutani Roshi went to study under Harada Roshi and it was under his tutelage that he came to enlightenment. So his actual dharma line is that of Harada Roshi. I personally feel that this is the proper state of affairs. In modern Japan, however, where there are a large number of temples and where the so-called Soto School and Rinzai School have spread, there is probably no other way. What we have here in today’s koan is a slightly different situation. You have a sense of the purity of Zen in its past. In this case, the monk has his initial experience at a certain master’s temple, but then inherits the dharma of the master at whose temple he realized great enlightenment. At any rate, since it’s a matter of coming to great

⁷ Teaching means and methods in Zen.

⁸ “The three paths” are a path of pine trees, a path of chrysanthemums and a path of willows. The entire sentence is an allusion to a verse composed by Tōenmei (“The three paths are desolate, yet the pine trees and mums are still there”).

enlightenment under the direction of that other master and inheriting his dharma, we have a case of the dharma bloodline and the line in terms of realization being the same. Nowadays, however, the situation has become quite confused. Be that as it may, there is a certain relationship between the circumstances in this koan and the case of Yasutani Roshi, for example, which I just described.

Shôyô intimately encountered Bokushû, yet he burnt succession incense for old Seppô; Shôyô was another name of Unmon Daishi and was also the name of the locality where he resided. Unmon had an initial experience under the direction of Bokushû. When he would go to Bokushû in dokusan, Bokushû would roar out, “Who is it!?” Unmon said “Bun’eki!” in reply. Bun’eki was his original family name. If Bokushû felt there was no promise in the reply, he would slam the door to his room shut, as if to say, there’s nothing to teach to the likes of you! One day the same thing happened, but this time Unmon managed to get one foot inside the door before Bokushû slammed it shut. However, this resulted in the door slamming on his foot and breaking his leg! “Ouch!!” he cried out in pain, and in that moment he realized great enlightenment. Unmon realized such a stinging and incisive enlightenment! The experience was all the clearer as a result. Nevertheless, Unmon did not become the dharma successor of Bokushû. Instead he went after that to study under Seppô Gizon Zenji, and it was under that other master’s direction that he “pushed out the bottom of the bucket,” so to speak. He then inherited Seppô’s dharma. This is what is meant by the statement here that he “burnt succession incense for old Seppô.” In that way he became a Zen master in his own right. As I mentioned just now, it is only when a young monk has gone through the entire koan study and finished that study in the room that he is more or less considered as having the ability to take over the abbotship of a temple. It is his master who gives approval in that case. It is a matter of appointing him to become the head monk of the monk’s community of the temple. Such a person is known as “shuza” (literally “head seat”) in Japanese. When a person attains such a position, it is as if the Roshi has given half of his authority to such a person. This has its origins in the story of how Shakyamuni Buddha gave half of his seat to Mahakashapa as his successor. Such a person is then known as “hasan,” which literally means “giving up dokusan,” in the sense that the process of study “in the room” has been completed. This being so, to say that Unmon “burnt succession incense for old Seppô” refers to a ceremony by which the monk who has finished koan study becomes the abbot of the temple, which is known as the “shinzanshiki” (literally: “ceremony of advancing to the mountain,” since temples also were known as “mountains” as they were usually built on mountain tops). In that ceremony, the new abbot first burns incense and then calls out “banzai” (literally “ten-thousand years”) three times in way of praying for the long reign of the reigning emperor and for the emperor’s long life. Buddhism has a tradition of paying deep respect toward the reigning emperor. After this, he burns incense for his teacher, referring to him with his name and the title Daioshô (great teacher), thus expressing how he attained great enlightenment under that master and has now inherited that master’s dharma. It was thus natural for Unmon to burn incense before

Seppô and not before Bokushû, since it was in Seppô's temple and under his direction that he had his final, decisive experience. Bokushû for his part originally practiced under Ôbaku Zenji together with Rinzai. We are familiar with the story of how Rinzai, although a student of Ôbaku, did not go to him in dokusan. Aware of this, Bokushû asked him why he was not going to dokusan. Rinzai wanted to know what he should ask in dokusan. This was evidently how Rinzai was at that time. He was told by Bokushû to ask the following question when he went to dokusan: What is the ultimate meaning of Buddhism? Rinzai did what he was told, whereupon Ôbaku hit him with his stick. When Rinzai returned ruefully from dokusan, Bokushû asked what had happened. Rinzai related the traumatic meeting with the master. Bokushû told him to go again with the same question. This happened three times. Dôgen Zenji is quite critical of Rinzai Zenji in his writings and singles out this story for special mention. He is nonplussed to find Rinzai asking Bokushû what he should say in dokusan! Of course, Rinzai did not remain in that state. I simply mention this in connection with Bokushû, who is mentioned in today's Introduction.

Tôsu personally received it from Enkan, yet he succeeded in the Dharma to Daiyô. I have mentioned these matters in a former teisho. Tôsu Gisei Zenji was of the Soto lineage, and caused that school to flourish, even influencing Dôgen Zenji. He first studied under Fusan Hôen Zenji. Fuzan Enkan Zenji (as he is also known) first practiced under Sekken Kisei Zenji, seventh in succession after Rinzai, and inherited his dharma. He then went to practice under Daiyô Kyôgen Zenji. Sekken Kisei Zenji is of the Rinzai lineage. Evidently Fuzan Enkan Zenji was not satisfied with his experience. Daiyô was an outstanding master who was fifth in succession in the lineage of Tôzan Gohon Daishi. At any rate, Fuzan immediately felt they he was on the same wavelength as Daiyô and eventually inherited his dharma. As he had already inherited the dharma of Sekken Kisei Zenji, he refused to inherit Daiyô's dharma. Since Daiyô was already of advanced age at that time, he was very disappointed to hear this. Taking pity on the master, Fuzan received the robe and bowl as symbols of the dharma and put them aside, hoping to find someone he could feel confident about in transferring the dharma. This was his motivation in receiving the robe and bowl from Daiyô, who could then die in peace. That evening, Tôsu Gien Zenji came to pay a call on Fuzan Enkan Zenji. Recognizing Tôsu as an outstanding person, Fuzan told Tôsu about what had happened and how he had received the robe and bowl of the Soto lineage with the agreement of Daiyô. He then asked Tôsu to inherit them. This is the reason that Daiyô Kyôgen Zenji is seen as 44th in succession. The details of this succession can be found in Chapter 22 of the *Transmission of Light* (Denkôroku). As this shows, it was not a case of direct transmission, but rather an indirect transmission. Although Tôsu had come to great enlightenment under Enkan, he inherited the dharma of Daiyô Kyôgen Zenji. These historical matters are referred to in this line of the instruction.

Jade blossoms bloom upon the coral branches;

Gold fruit ripens in the forest of sandalwood. These two lines are both said in

way of utmost praise. Some of you might be familiar with the koan, “the moon shines on the coral branches.” Coral branches are mentioned here as a symbol of great beauty. Even today, coral is quite a costly item. I see this line as praising our intrinsic Buddha nature. Such jade blossoms are reportedly only to be found in India. The Chinese characters in the original text are evidently a transliteration of the original Sanskrit word. They are evidently yellow flowers with a wonderful fragrance. “Gold” is also used here in way of effusive praise. The golden fruit ripens in the sandalwood forest, which is most fragrant. This, too, compares our true self to a flower and how it ripens as fruit, as sung in the second line. You have that true nature intrinsically, but it must flower for you to realize it. It must ripen as fruit. This is the meaning of these lines. To speak in terms of flowering and ripening means to realize great enlightenment.

Just tell me, how do such creations take place? In other words, what can we do in order that this flowering and ripening will take place? This is how we should see this line.

On the Case:

Head Monk Shishô asked Hôgen, “You have opened a zendo, Master. But who did you succeed to?” Head Monk Shishô was a student of Chôkei and eventually inherited the dharma of Seppô Gison Zenji. He appears from time to time in the *Blue Cliff Record*. Originally, however, both Shishô and Hôgen were brothers in the dharma as students of Chôkei Zenji. Shishô was slightly older. This is why Hôgen is referred to as “master.” When they were both monks, Shishô was the head monk (shuza), which means he was playing the role of instructing Hôgen. Hôgen Zenji, however, did not inherit the dharma of Chôkei Zenji. Instead he became the dharma successor of Chizô. I consider Hôgen to be a wonderful Zen master. The so-called Hôgen School was one of the original five schools of Zen, the others being Soto, Rinzai, Unmon and Igyô. I am very fond of him and feel I have learned a great deal from him. It might be strange to talk here about myself, but I feel a great affinity with Hôgen and also with Sekitô Kisen Zenji. I feel that Hôgen is a truly wonderful master in terms of the clarity of his dharma eye. As mentioned, Hôgen later became a disciple of Chizô and inherited his dharma. Chizô was also very outstanding. It was when Hôgen was on pilgrimage that he first came to Chizô. They discussed many matters with each other. Hôgen bade goodbye and put on his sandals to take his leave. Chizô saw him off at the gate of the temple, which was quite an honor. There happened to be a large stone at the gate. Chizô said, “You often say that Buddha and Mind are one or that self and other are one. Is that stone inside you or outside you?” Hôgen said, “It is inside me.” Being a Zen monk, it would not have been unseemly for him to say that it was outside! Chizô said, “Oh, is that so? In that case, it will probably be quite difficult for you to continue your pilgrimage with that rock inside you.” Hearing this, Hôgen realized that Chizô was no ordinary Zen master. He decided to stay at his temple and continue his practice. He eventually came to full enlightenment and inherited Chizô’s dharma. To say that Hôgen “opened a zendo” means he “set up shop,” so to speak, as a Zen master. We find the

following not in the koan itself but in the longer commentary by Old Man Banshō that accompanies this koan. It tells how Elder Monk Shishō, brimming with indignation, thought it most unseemly of Hōgen, originally a disciple of Chōkei, to have inherited Chizō's dharma and opened a zendo. Accompanied by many students, he set off to put a stop to such matters. This is where the present mondo begins. Receiving this entourage, Hōgen evidently treated them with kindness. Although Shishō was head monk, he himself did not yet have the credentials of an abbot. Nevertheless, Hōgen treats him as an equal, expressing utmost respect. The commentary also reports that he gave each of the accompanying monks a *kotsu*. When we remember that such an act of presenting a *kotsu* is usually only done to those who have finished koan study in the sense that they are now qualified to act on one's behalf to instruct in Zen, this was a most kind treatment. But Shishō was still not satisfied. This leads to this initial question: "You have opened a zendo, Master. But who did you succeed to?"

Of course, Shishō already knew whom Hōgen had succeeded to, but he posed the question nonetheless.

Hōgen said, "Master Jizō."

Shishō said, "You have gone a great deal against your late master Chōkei." In other words, isn't that an insult to Chōkei, considering all he did for you, to go on and inherit Chizō's dharma?

Hōgen said, "I still don't understand a turning word of Chōkei's." In other words, when he was still a disciple of Chōkei, he still didn't understand it, but he understands it now and thus could not inherit Chōkei's dharma.

Shishō said, "Why didn't you ask me?" In other words: Since I know all about Chōkei's Zen, why don't you ask me?

Hōgen said, "'The one body manifests itself in myriad phenomena' – what does it mean?" Chōkei evidently had two sayings, and this is the first of them.

Shishō stuck up his whisk. It's not a full score, perhaps 70%.

Hōgen said, "That is what you learned under Chōkei. What is your own view, Head Monk?" Starting at this point in the exchange, Hōgen suddenly becomes quite spirited and lively. Hōgen isn't interested in half-baked things learned from one's master; he wants to see the real thing, issuing from Shishō's own experience.

Shishō was silent. He was unable to say anything in reply, stumped for an answer.

Hōgen said, "When it is said, 'The one body manifests itself in myriad phenomena' – are the myriad phenomena swept away or are they not?" In other words, when the one body manifests itself, is the entire phenomenal world turned over so there is only the one body, or is there the one body in the ten thousand phenomena? What an interesting question! In the question it is already two. There is the possibility that the myriad phenomena clear away everything and only the single body appears. Is this a case, in other words, of "above earth and below heaven I alone am honored (*tenjō tenge yuiga dokusan*). Or is it a case of the single body or "I alone honored" while the myriad things are there?

Shishô said, "Not swept away."

Shishô maintains that they are not swept away.

Hôgen said, "There are two." Hôgen says that, if you say they are not swept away, there are two things; the one body and myriad things.

All the disciples on the right and the left side said, "Swept away." This shows that they have completely failed.

Hôgen said, "The one body manifests itself in myriad phenomena – Nii!" It's just that sound, nothing else. That sound sweeps away both the one body and the myriad things. Do you understand! It's no other than this: Craack! (Roshi raps the rostrum with his kotsu).

On the Verse:

Away from thoughts, you see the Buddha,

Breaking through the dust, you draw out the Sutra. The "thoughts" are all concepts and ideas. It's because of the thoughts that we do not see Buddha. From morning to evening we're thinking and speculating about this and that. Our heads are filled with all sorts of garbage, preventing us from seeing the original Buddha. You can see "sutras" here as meaning the same as "Buddha" in the first line. It means our true self. The sutras are talking about nothing else but that true fact. The dust can also be seen as meaning our concepts and ideas. It is because of the "dust" of our concepts that we fail to see the truth.

The family Dharma is right here and now:

Who should establish the [facilities] of the gate at all? If we can simply make that matter clear, then the family dharma is right here at this moment. The family Dharma means the Buddha dharma or Buddhism itself. In other words, the phenomena, as we see and hear them, are the true fact itself. This is the same as the saying *Genjô-Kôan*, which is also a chapter in Dôgen Zenji's *Shôbôgenzô*. The koan means the essential world. In other words, the phenomena are no other than the essence. In that case, "who should establish the [facilities] of the gate at all"? What need is there to do anything additionally? The facilities of the gate can be seen as all sorts of skillful means that are brought up to bring people to realization, such as creating koans to have them practice with, or delivering teishos like this. All of that is like the facilities of the gate. They are just methods to pull people this way and that way, although there is no need for such things. It is just as you see it, just as you hear it. This holds for everything. Just as you see it, is Buddha. Just as you see it, is all things. There is no true fact outside of this. But we consider this and that, believing there to be something else. That is known as philosophy. Such speculations lead nowhere, there's no conclusion. In the latest issue of *Kyôshô* I wrote about Iwamoto Sensei, my philosophy teacher in the First Higher School. When he prepared his lectures he would write his notes in pencil in Japanese style on coarse paper and would read his notes out in class. Over the years he continuously polished his style, producing wonderfully pithy texts. At the beginning of his notes was the following sentence:

“Philosophy is the process by which Man, as a limited existence, attempts to comprehend the limitless universe.” This proposition sees Man as limited. He is a limited existence in face of the limitless. Here it has been decided that he is limited and is attempting to embrace a limitless universe. It is already clear from the beginning that this cannot be achieved. This is the sad fate of philosophy. From our standpoint, however, Man is not limited. It is a case of a limitless existence attempting to embrace limitlessness. Actually, they are one from the start. Thus, philosophy, no matter how it tries, cannot grasp this fact. This is the essence of what is known as the Genjô-Kôan. This same fate belongs to Buddhist philosophy. You might think you understand, but you really don’t. It’s as if you were looking through opaque frosted glass. On the other hand, many of the great worthies of the past were steeped in knowledge of Buddhist philosophy. For example, Tôsu Gisei Zenji, mentioned above, was a scholar of the *Huayen (Kegon) Sutra* and was referred to as Sei-Kegon (Monk Sei of the Kegon Sutra). Nevertheless, if we simply content ourselves with intellectual understanding, it is like trying to “scratch an itchy spot on the foot through the surface of the shoe.” It lacks true clarity. That is why we practice zazen. And when you truly grasp the true fact in actual experience, all “skillful means” (hoben) become unnecessary. Isn’t it completely revealed, just as you see it, just as you hear it? It is completely clear. Just as the bird calls “peep-peep.” Or: “Oh, what a beautiful flower!” “Oh, I’m so happy!” “Oh, I’m so sad!”

The moon follows the boat, flowing into the river of silken purity,

The spring comes with the grass, pervading the [fresh] green in the burnt field. These lines have connections with old Chinese tales, which need not be explained here in detail. The essence is that they present the form of the Genjô-Kôan just as it is. As I just mentioned, this is the reality expressed in the statement, “the phenomena are no other than the essential.” The “river of silken purity” could be seen as the Yangtze River. This expresses the beautiful sight of a river flowing by without raising a single wave, much like spun silk. And on the surface is a boat, which is lit up by the moonlight so that it seems as if the moon is following it. Just as it is, it is the true fact (genjô-kôan).

In spring there are fires on the fields to burn down the brush and make room for the new plants sprouting. That fresh green of the spring on the burnt field, that scenery itself can be seen as an example of what we have been referring to here as genjô-kôan, in the sense that that scenery is a complete revelation of our true nature.

Swept away? Not swept away? – Listen with utmost care! If you are ruminating about “swept away” or “not swept away” you only cause confusion. So just “listen with utmost care!” If you just listen absent-mindedly you are apt to miss it! In the true fact there is neither “swept away” nor “not swept away.” It is just as you see it, just as you hear it.

The three paths are desolate, yet one was able to return; This line has its origin in a poem by the famous poet Tao Yuanming. A certain person created three small paths leading to his house and three persons played on those paths. Tao Yuanming left that house and became a government official, experiencing all sorts of hardships. He then decided to

return home, having had enough of that sort of life. He says that the fields may be rampant with weeds, but he will return just the same. Even though the three paths are covered with weeds, there is still a home to return to. Applying this to Zen practice, you could see it as leaving your home and engaging in intellectual research, after which you feel a desire to return home after all, feeling that to be the best. The garden may be filled with weeds, but you experience great relief on returning home.

The old pines and chrysanthemums are still balmy and fragrant. The old pine trees are still green and the chrysanthemums give off their fragrance as in old times. I have gone on at some length describing the meaning, but I think you get the general picture by now.