

CASE 97

Emperor Dōkō's Helmet Hood



By Yamada Kōun

Instruction:

Bodhidharma met Emperor Bu of Ryō, solely wishing to transmit the heart-mind.

Enkan knew [Emperor] Daichū; he certainly had the eye.

“Peace prevails under heaven, the king enjoys long life” – he doesn’t violate heavenly majesty;

“The sun and the moon stay their light, the four seasons are all in harmony” – the king’s reign augments its sovereign light.

When the king of people and the king of the Dharma meet,
What should they talk about?

Case:

Emperor Dōkō spoke to Kōke saying, “I have attained the treasure of the Central Plain. However, no one can set a price on it.” Kōke said, “Your Majesty, please lend it to me so that I may see.” The emperor pulled the straps of his helmet hood with both hands. Kōke said, “Who can dare to set a price on the emperor’s treasure!”

Verse:

The king’s true intention is communicated to the best friend;

All people under heaven [naturally] show sincerity
with the heart of the sunflowers [inclining toward the sun].

He took out the priceless treasure of the Central Plain,
incomparable with the jewel of Chō or the gold of En.

The gem of the Central Plain is manifested to Kōke;

Its excellent radiance is beyond appraisal.

The works of the emperor can well be the teacher for ten thousand
generations;

The beams of the golden wheel illuminate the four directions under heaven.

On the Instruction:

Bodhidharma met Emperor Bu of Ryō, solely wishing to transmit the heart-mind. The Instruction has its sights set on the Main Case in revealing the very essence of Zen Buddhism. The Case is brought forth as an actual example of that essence. Because the Instruction preaches the true marrow of Buddhism while setting its sights on the

example, it is known originally as *shiju*, which means “revealing it to the assembly.” When Bodhidharma first arrived in China he had an audience with the Emperor Bu of Ryō (Chinese: Emperor Wu of Liang). The emperor had assumed that Bodhidharma was a wondrous person and asked him: “What is the Highest Principle of the Holy Truth?” Let me explain what this means briefly. Truth in the usual sense as used in society is known as *zokutai* (profane truth), being the truth that passes for such in society. In contrast, *shintai* (authentic truth) is the truth of the world of *satori*. If you practice *zazen* fervently you will realize the world of *satori*. And the truth that transcends such divisions of profane truth and authentic truth (in the sense of containing them both) is known as *shōtai* (holy truth). In terms of my oft-cited fraction, profane truth would be the world of the numerator, while authentic truth would be the world of the denominator. Then holy truth would be the entire fraction enclosed with a circle. The emperor had been waiting for Bodhidharma. His question is actually about the ultimate meaning of Buddhism. He is asking: What is the ultimate meaning or truth of this world, where even Buddhism is not necessary? Then Bodhidharma set its sights on the world “holy” in holy truth and said: Vast emptiness, nothing holy! Vast emptiness is just like a perfectly blue sky. He says that it is completely empty, with not a trace of holy. “Holy” is a concept. But the emperor could not understand this answer. He then said: Who is it that stands before me? Who are you? Here I had been thinking you are a holy man, but now you are saying that there is no holiness! Who are you after all? In reply, Bodhidharma said, “I don’t know.”

How is it that we are sitting here like this now? Scientifically you might be able to say that you are here because of your parents. But where were you before your parents were born? There is the koan: What is your original face before your parents were born? You can only say that you don’t know. This world can be discovered in Buddhism. Of course, I believe that this world can also be found in Christianity. If you ask certain Christian theologians, they seem to know all about God. But there is also the standpoint of “I don’t know.” This is what this first line of today’s Instruction is talking about. Why did Bodhidharma come to visit the emperor? He solely wished “to transmit the heart-mind.” This is not a matter of transmitting something that can be explained in terms of science of psychology. He wanted to convey to him the essence of the mind, what the mind really is. That was his reason for coming from India. And when we investigate the essence of mind, we realize that it is empty. It is the world of “body and mind fallen away” (*shinjin datsu raku*). Bodhidharma wanted somehow to make the emperor realize this world of emptiness of the true mind. In the beginning only Shakyamuni Buddha had realized it. Bodhidharma had come to China to convey that same mind. This is an example of that.

Enkan knew [Emperor] Daichū; he certainly had the eye. This also has a story behind it. Enkan is actually a place name and located in Hangzhou. I also travelled there and saw the West Lake (Xihu). Eikai Oshō lived on the shores of that lake. In Enkan, located in Hangzhou, there lived a great Zen master named Saian Zenji. He is thus known as Saian Zenji of Enkan. Emperor Daichū means the Emperor Genshū of the Tang Dynasty. Daichū was the reign name for that period. The people of that time, thinking it inauspicious to directly say the name of the emperor, referred to him by the name of the reign year. This emperor was Emperor Busō, the emperor prior to Sensō. He was a very cruel emperor, so that Emperor Sensō was persecuted by him greatly. Sensō eventually fled from the palace, thinking it dangerous to remain. The one guiding him in his escape at that time was a man named Kannan, who was like an attendant. Thanks to him, the emperor was able to escape from the palace. He then dressed up like a monk so that people would not know who he was, and travelled around to different temples. When he arrived at Enkan he was able to meet with Saian Zenji. Upon seeing Sensō, Saian Zenji knew that this was no ordinary person. He saw to his needs in many respects. Emperor Busō, on the other hand, was a terrible persecutor of Buddhism. When Emperor Sensō later became the emperor, the monk knew that Buddhism would now flourish. He had a premonition that this would come true. He then asked the Emperor to assist in the revival of Buddhism. This is what is meant by this line of the

Instruction. To say “he certainly had the eye” means that he could see clearly that Sensō, still in hiding in the clothes of a monk, would eventually ascend the throne as emperor.

“Peace prevails under heaven, the king enjoys long life.” – he doesn’t violate heavenly majesty; This line, too, has a story behind it. Parshva was the 10th patriarch in India. He was an unusual person who is said to have remained sixty years in his mother’s womb. I wonder if such a thing is true. After he was born, it was eighty years until he met up with the Ninth Patriarch Buddhmitra. After becoming a monk, it is said that he did not lie down for three years, making him quite a fellow. He had made a pledge: “Until I gain complete knowledge...my ribs will not touch the mat (in sleeping)” The Chinese characters used for his name, Kyo, actually mean “ribs,” and might have come from this saying of his. We don’t know for sure. At any rate, he did not lie down day or night. There has been this tradition over the centuries in Zen of not lying down, and in his case he did not lie down for three years.

Intellectual research on Buddhism has given birth to the Sutras, Vinaya and Abhidhamma. The sutras are the words of the Buddha. The Vinaya are injunctions on ethical behavior, telling us to avoid certain actions. The Abidhamma are not the Vinaya or the dharma itself. They are not sutras, but rather treatises on the sutras and vinaya. There are a large number of such philosophical texts. We make this division into three and refer to them collectively as the Tripitaka (lit. “three baskets”). People who had mastered these texts were known themselves as Tripitaka (Japanese: Sanzō) and were the object of praise. Parshva was able to achieve this in three years and then become the successor of the Ninth Patriarch. But he was probably quite old by that time, because he had only met his master when he was already over eighty. At that time, monk who was very strong in debating challenged Parshva to a debate. It was moreover ordained that they should debate before the emperor, agreeing that the person who lost would become the disciple of the other person. Parshva eventually won the debate. Because the debate was held before the emperor, the younger man wanted Parshva to speak first. But Parshva said, “I am old and do not wish to speak first. Please ask me any questions you like.” The young contender nonetheless maintained that they should go in the order of age and asked Parshva to make the first statement, boldly claiming he would refute his arguments one by one. So Parshva spoke up:

“Peace prevails under heaven, the king enjoys long life. The land is prosperous and happy, with no calamities or afflictions.”

There was no way the other person could refute these statements, which meant that he had already lost. Parshva did not have to say much to win. With his first words, he already had his opponent checkmated. Although it would have been a case of *lèse majesté*, because he does not argue, “he doesn’t violate heavenly majesty.” He did not say anything that could be refuted in any way.

The sun and the moon stay their light, the four seasons are all in harmony” – the king’s reign augments its sovereign light. Normally the sun and moon do not stop their light. When night falls, the sun’s light disappears. This is speaking about the world of satori, and the sun and moon never rest their light. They always maintain it. To say that the four seasons are in harmony means that it is always the best season. To say that the light is always rested is not speaking about the world of phenomena. It is speaking about the sun and moon of the essential world, the world of satori. Because they always shine and never go out, this is known as staying their light. As for the second part, every day is a good day, every time is the best season. To say that the “king’s reign augments its sovereign light” means that, thanks to the virtue of the emperor, the people are led in a good direction. When the king of people and the king of the Dharma meet,

What should they talk about? The Chinese language includes the word *té* (Japanese: *toku*), which is usually translated as “virtue” in English. But actually there is no word in Western languages that precisely connotes what the word *té* or *toku* expresses, no word that precisely matches it in meaning. It’s hard to find words in Western languages that

precisely express what is being said here. When we get down to it, toku or virtue is a condition in which the egotistical mind has disappeared. When egotistical feelings gradually diminish, then tē (toku) or virtue gradually appears. Needless to say, the word tē (toku) also appears in the teachings of Confucius and Mencius. At any rate, if there is no tē, then the feeling that “self and other are one” will not grow stronger. Such a person cannot be said to be a person with tē, and it will not be possible for such a person to bring about peace. It might seem like a digression, but one has the feeling of a thaw in relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in recent times. When both sides are engaged in aggressive actions toward the other party, this, to put it bluntly, is due to a lack of tē. I am not speaking solely on the level of individuals. It’s also a way of thinking, and both countries have their own respective way of seeing things. There is more of a standoff and no feeling of “self and other as one.” I often give the example of the Japanese Confucian scholar Ninomiya Sontoku, who found his way in life through the teachings of Confucius and Mencius. But he was also deeply steeped in Buddhism, including the world of Zen, I believe. There is a story recounted about him. When he and his disciples happened to be staying at an inn, they went to the bath, which was evidently still a bit tepid. They had the boy servant light a fire to warm up the water, so that hot water gradually started to come. That meant there were areas of the bath that were still tepid and other parts that were already quite warm. If you tried to push the hot water in your own direction, it would come your way and then be reflected off the sides and go in the other direction. But if you pushed the warmer water in the direction of the others, the hot water would eventually come to you. In this observation was a very wise teaching about our dealings with others. This is indeed a case of “self and other as one.” Unless such a basic feeling becomes the feeling of our world leaders, I don’t believe that true peace is possible. I would like these people if possible to practice Zen and realize satori. But these individuals are probably far too busy to practice Zen. Even if we know it to be true that the world is one, it will probably take two or three centuries for this to be realized. And I am secretly hoping that this way of thinking will gradually become the common way of thinking. That is because the currency of the West, the Western way of thinking, is gradually taking a turn for the worse. It’s sad but true. Take the case of England. In my childhood, Great Britain was a great empire with holdings spread around the world, to the point that it was said that the sun never set on the British Empire. Although it might have been the results of the Second World War, one has the feeling that its influence in the world has weakened considerably. The biggest problem is the financial problem, which can probably be said to be at an impasse at present. Although this might be my private opinion, I personally feel that England’s economic woes are the result of the problems between labor and management, who are unable to come to an agreement. As long as that situation continues they will remain at loggerheads with each other, a situation that could lead to economic collapse. I understand that *The Times* of London, that famous newspaper, had to be sold. This was reportedly due to a failure to come to an agreement with the newspaper staff. Rupert Murdoch, an Australian, ended up buying the newspaper. But even in his case, he had a very hard time of it, as it was so difficult to come to a settlement of labor disputes. Both sides remained adamant and unyielding. As a result of this, a country or enterprise gradually loses its economic powers. I myself have acted in the past at companies as the person responsible for labor relations. My work consisted of having discussions with union members. When we first sat down for discussions, they refused even to drink the tea served to them, believing they would then be pressured. But gradually they began to understand our side of the story. I feel such an attitude is typical of the Japanese. You could compare it to fruit in Japan, such as apples or mandarin oranges. Here you have no choice but to give fertilizer to cause them to produce good fruit and then divide them up. One has the feeling that in England for example, they are just letting the tree wither away. One has the impression that such an attitude of dualistic opposition is the basis for doing things in the West. In saying such things I might be inviting the wrath of my Western listeners. I feel there is the same tendency in the U.S. When we returned to Japan from Manchuria one year after Japan’s defeat, all of the cars being driven around Tokyo were American cars, such as

Chryslers and Dodges. The Japanese cars were little Datsuns that looked like potato bugs. But now, thirty years later, it's the Americans who are throwing up their hands in defeat on the car market here. The reason once again is because discussions between labor and management in the U.S. auto industry do not fare well. The result is that one has the impression that Western culture is entering a period of decline. Having brought it to flower, we should do what we can to keep it alive. A world of dualistic opposition is not the real world. The real world is the world of oneness. We somehow have to make this known to everyone. But once I get going on this topic there will be no end. So today I will conclude my teisho after having spoken only about the Instruction, whose last words run:

When the king of people and the king of the Dharma meet,
What should they talk about?