

Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma
Book 62

The Intention of the Ancestral Master's Coming from the West
(*Soshi seirai i*)

香巖寺襲燈大師<嗣大滙諱智閑>示衆云、如人千尺懸崖上樹、口嚼樹枝、脚不踏樹、手不攀枝、樹下忽有人問、如何是祖師西來意。當恁麼時、若開口答佗、即喪身失命、若不答佗、又違佗所問。當恁麼時、且道、作麼生即得。時有虎頭照上座、出衆云、上樹時即不問、未上樹時、請和尚道、如何。師乃呵呵大笑。

The Great Master Xideng of Xiangyan zi (succeeded Dagui; known as Zhixian) addressed the assembly, saying, “A person is up a tree above a thousand foot precipice. His mouth bites the tree branch; his feet don't stand on the tree; his hands don't hang on a branch. All of a sudden, a person beneath the tree asks him, ‘What is the intention of the ancestral master's coming from the west?’ At that time, if he opens his mouth to answer him, he forfeits his body and loses his life; if he doesn't answer him, he flunks his question. Tell me, what should he do?”

At that time, the senior monk Hutou Zhao came forth from the assembly and said, “I'm not asking about when he's up the tree; please tell us, Reverend, how about when he's not yet up the tree?”

The master gave a great laugh, “Ha ha.”¹

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而今の因縁、おほく商量拈古あれど、道得箇まれなり。おそらくはすべて茫然なるがごとし。しかありといへども、不思議を拈來し、非思量を拈來して思量せんに、おのづから香巖老と一蒲團の功夫あらん。すでに香巖老と一蒲團上に兀坐せば、さらに香巖未開口已前に、この因縁を參詳すべし。香巖老の眼睛をぬすみて覷見するのみにあらず、釋迦牟尼佛の正法眼藏を拈出して覷破すべし。

Although there have been many discussions and comments on the present episode, those that can say something are rare. Generally speaking, they all seem to be at a loss. Nevertheless, when we take up “not thinking,” when we take up “non-thinking,” and think about it, we will naturally have concentrated effort on the same cushion as old Xiangyan. Since we are sitting fixedly on the same cushion as old Xiangyan, we should go on to a detailed investigation of this episode before Xiangyan has opened his mouth. Not only should we steal old Xiangyan's eye and look at it; we should take out “the treasury of the eye of the true dharma” of the Buddha Śākyamuni and look through it.²

如人千尺懸崖上樹。この道、しづかに參究すべし。なにをか人といふ、露柱にあらずば、木樞といふべからず。佛面祖面の破顔なりとも、自己佗己の相見あやまらざるべし。いま人上樹のところは、盡大地にあらず、百尺竿頭にあらず、これ千尺懸崖なり。たとひ脱落去すとも、千尺懸崖裏なり。落時あり、上時あり。如人千尺懸崖裏上樹といふ、しるべし、上時ありといふこと。しかあれば、向上也千尺なり、向下也千尺なり、左頭也千尺なり、右頭也千尺なり、遮

裏也千尺なり、那裏也千尺なり、如人也千尺なり、上樹也千尺なり。向來の千尺は、恁麼なるべし。且問すらくは、千尺量多少。いはく、如古鏡量なり、如火爐量なり、如無縫塔量なり。

“A person is up a tree above a thousand foot precipice”: we should quietly investigate these words. What is the “person”? If it is not a column, we should not call it a post. Though it be the face of a buddha and the face of an ancestor breaking into a smile, we should not be mistaken about the meeting of self and other. This place where “a person is up a tree” is not the entire earth, not “a hundred foot pole”; it is “a thousand foot precipice.” Even if he drops off, he is within “a thousand foot precipice.” There is a time of dropping, a time of climbing. Where he says, “A person is up a tree above a thousand foot precipice,” we should realize that this is saying there is a time of climbing. Consequently, ascent is a thousand feet, descent is a thousand feet; left is a thousand feet, right is a thousand feet; here is a thousand feet, there is a thousand feet. “A person” is a thousand feet; “up a tree” is a thousand feet. So far, a thousand feet should be like this. Now, what I ask is, “what size is a thousand feet?” It is the size of “the old mirror”; it is the size of “the brazier”; it is the size of “the seamless pagoda.”³

口嚙樹枝。いかにあらんかこれ口。たとひ口の全闊全口をしらずといへども、しばらく樹枝より尋枝摘葉しもてゆきて、口の所在しるべし。しばらく樹枝を把拈して、口をつくれるあり。このゆゑに、全口是枝なり、全枝是口なり、通身口なり、通口是身なり。樹自踏樹、ゆゑに脚不踏樹といふ、脚自踏脚のごとし。枝自攀枝、ゆゑに手不攀枝といふ、手自攀手のごとし。しかあれども、脚跟、なほ進歩退歩あり、手頭、なほ作拳開拳あり。自佗の人家、しばらくおもふ、掛虚空なり、と。しかあれども、掛虚空、それ嚙樹枝にしかむや。

“His mouth bites the tree branch.” What is the “mouth”? Even though we do not know the whole mouth, the whole vastness of the mouth, we will know the location of the mouth by starting from “the tree branch” and “searching the branches and plucking at the leaves” for a while. By grasping the branch for a while, the mouth was made. Therefore, the whole mouth is the branch; the whole branch is the mouth. It is the mouth throughout the body; throughout the mouth is the body. The tree stands on the tree; therefore, it says, “his feet don’t stand on the tree,” as if his feet themselves stand on his feet. The branch hangs on the branch; therefore, it says, “his hands don’t hang on a branch,” as if his hands themselves hang on his hands. Nevertheless, his feet still “step forward and step back”; his hands still make a fist and open a fist. We and others sometimes think he is “hanging in space.” However, can “hanging in space” compare with “biting the tree branch”?⁴

樹下忽有人問、如何是祖師西來意。この樹下忽有人は、樹裏有人といふのごとし、人樹ならんがごとし。人下忽有人問、すなはちこれなり。しかあれば、樹問樹なり、人問人なり。擧樹擧問なり、擧西來意、問西來意なり。問著人、また口嚙樹枝して問來するなり。口嚙枝にあらざれば、問著することあたはず。満口の音聲なし、満言の口あらず。西來意を問著するときは、嚙西來意にて問著するなり。

“All of a sudden, a person beneath the tree asks him, ‘What is the intention of the ancestral master’s coming from the west?’” This “person beneath the tree” is like saying “a person within the tree,” as if it were a person tree. “All of a sudden a person beneath a person asks him”—this is what this is. Therefore, the tree asks the tree; the person asks the person. They raise the tree and raise the question; they raise “the intention of coming from the west” and question “the intention of coming from the west.” The questioner also asks the question with “his mouth

biting the tree branch.” If his mouth were not biting the branch, he could not be questioning: he would have no sound filling his mouth; he would have no mouth filled with words. When he asks about “the intention of coming from the west,” he asks while biting “the intention of coming from the west.”⁵

若開口答佗、即喪身失命。いま若開口答佗の道、したしくすべし。不開口答佗もあるべし、ときこゆ。もししかあらんときは、不喪身失命なるべし。たとひ開口不開口ありとも、口嚙樹枝をさまたぐべからず。開閉、かならずしも全口にあらず、口に開閉もあるなり。しかあれば、嚙枝は全口の家常なり、開閉口をさまたぐべからず。開口答佗といふは、開樹枝答佗するをいふか、開西來意答佗するをいふか。もし開西來意答佗にあらずば、答西來意にあらず。すでに答佗あらず、これ全身保命なり、喪身失命といふべからず。さきより喪身失命せば、答佗あるべからず。しかあれども、香嚴のこころ、答佗を辞せず、ただおそらくは喪身失命のみなり。しるべし、未答佗時、護身保命なり。忽答佗時、翻身活命なり。はかりしりぬ、人人満口是道なり。答佗すべし、答自すべし、問佗すべし、問自すべし。これ口嚙道なり、口嚙道を口嚙枝といふなり。若答佗時、口上更開一隻口なり。若不答佗、違佗所問なりといへども、不違自所問なり。

“If he opens his mouth to answer him, he forfeits his body and loses his life.” We should become familiar with these words “if he opens his mouth to answer him.” It sounds as if there must also be “not opening his mouth to answer him.” If such is the case, he should not “forfeit his body and lose his life.” Even if there be opening the mouth and closing the mouth, they should not prevent “his mouth bites the tree branch.” Opening and closing are not necessarily the whole mouth, though the mouth does have opening and closing. Therefore, biting the branch is the everyday routine of the whole mouth; it should not prevent opening and closing the mouth. Does saying “he opens his mouth to answer him” mean he opens “the tree branch” to answer him? He opens “the intention in coming from the west” to answer him? If it is not opening “the intention of coming from the west” to answer him, it is not answering [the question of] “the intention of coming from the west.” And, since it is not answering him, this is “his whole body protecting his life”; we cannot say that “he forfeits his body and loses his life.” If he had already “forfeited his body and lost his life,” he would not answer him. Nevertheless, in Xiangyan’s mind, he does not avoid answering him; it seems he has simply “forfeited his body and lost his life.” We should realize that before he has answered him, he is guarding his body and protecting his life; once he suddenly answers him, he is flipping his body and restoring his life. Thus, we know that each person with a mouth full is saying it: he should answer the other; he should answer himself; he should ask the other; he should ask himself. This is the mouth biting the saying; his mouth biting the saying is called “his mouth bites the branch.” If he answers him, he opens a mouth on top of his mouth; if he does not answer him, though “he flunks the other’s question,” he does not flunk his own question.⁶

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しかあればしるべし、答西來意する一切の佛祖は、みな上樹口嚙樹枝の時節にあひあたりて、答來するなり。問西來意する一切の佛祖は、みな上樹口嚙樹枝の時節にあひあたりて、答來せるなり。

Therefore, we should realize that all the buddhas and ancestors who answer [the question of] “the intention of coming from the west” have been answering it as they encounter the moment of “up a tree, his mouth biting the tree branch”; all the buddhas and ancestors who ask about “the

intention of coming from the west” have answered it as they encounter the moment of “up a tree, his mouth biting the tree branch.”⁷

雪竇明覺禪師重顯和尚云、樹上道即易、樹下道即難。老僧上樹也、致將一問來。

The Chan Master Mingjue of Xuedou, the Venerable Chongxian, said, “To say something up a tree is easy; to say something down a tree is hard. This old monk is up a tree. Bring me a question.”⁸

いま致將一問來は、たとひ盡力來すとも、この問、きたることおそくして、うらむらくは答よりものちに問來せることを。あまねく古今の老古錐にとふ、香巖呵呵大笑する、これ、樹上道なりや、樹下道なりや、答西來意なりや、不答西來意なりや。試道看。

About this “bring me a question,” though we bring it with all our might, the question will arrive too late; I regret that we will have brought the question after the answer [has been given]. I ask the “venerable old awls” everywhere in past and present: Xiangyan’s great laugh, “ha ha” — is this “saying something up a tree,” or is it “saying something down a tree”? Is it answering “the intention of coming from the west,” or is it not answering “the intention of coming from the west”? Try saying something.⁹

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