CHAPTER FIFTEEN (Dai jūgo shō 第十五章)

Root Case1 【本則】

第十五祖、迦那提婆尊者、謁龍樹大士、將及門。龍樹知是智人、
先遣侍者、以滿鉢水、置於座前。尊者覩之、卽以一針投、而進之
相見、忻然契會。

The Fifteenth Ancestor, Venerable Kānadeva, calling on Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva, was about to reach the gate. Nāgārjuna knew that this was a wise person. In advance, he sent an acolyte to take a bowl full of water and place it before the dharma seat. The Venerable [Kānadeva] saw it, took a single needle, cast it into the water, and advanced to have a face-to-face encounter. In delight, their understandings matched.

Pivotal Circumstances 【機縁】

師は

The Master [Kānadeva]:

南天竺国の人なり。姓は毘舎羅。初め福業を求む。兼て辨論を楽む。

was a man of a country in South India. His clan was vaiśya. Initially he sought meritorious action and enjoyed disputation.

1 Root Case (C. benze 本則; J. honsoku). The Chinese passage quoted here is nearly identical to one that appears in the Jingde Era Record of the Transmission of the Flame (T 2076.51.211b2-6).

2 gate (C. men 门; J. mon). It seems that, in the imagination of the Chinese who authored this passage, the gate in question was the mountain gate (ceremonial main gate) of a monastery where Nāgārjuna was abbot, was attended by acolytes, and took the dharma seat in a dharma hall to engage in question and answer with members of the assembly. From the standpoint of modern scholarship, however, that is entirely anachronistic: the monastic arrangement assumed in the passage was that of Song dynasty China, which bears little resemblance to that of Buddhist monasteries in ancient India.

3 The Master (Shi wa 師は). The block of text that follows these words is a Japanese transcription (yomikudashi 読み下し) of an identical Chinese passage that appears in the Jingde Era Record of the Transmission of the Flame under the heading “Fifteenth Ancestor, Kānadeva”:

《景德傳燈錄》南天竺國人也。姓毘舎羅。初求福業兼樂辯論。(T 2076.51.211b2-3).
Venerable Nāgārjuna, having attained the dharma, was carrying out conversions and arrived in South India.¹ Many people of that country believed in meritorious action. Hearing the Venerable [Nāgārjuna] explain the sublime dharma to them, they spoke back to him: “For people, to have meritorious action is the most important thing in the world. You pointlessly speak of the buddha-nature. Who is able to see it?” Nāgārjuna said, “If you wish to see the buddha-nature, first you must eliminate your arrogance.” Those people said, “Is buddha-nature large or small?” Nāgārjuna said: “The buddha-nature is neither large nor small, neither broad nor narrow. It is neither blessings nor retributions; it does not die and is not born.” Upon hearing the superiority of this principle, they all turned back to their beginner’s minds.

¹ arrived in South India (minami Indo ni itaru 南印度に到る). The block of text that begins with these words is a Japanese transcription (yomikudashi 読み下し) of an identical Chinese passage that appears in the Jingde Era Record of the Transmission of Illumination by the Great Ancestor, Zen Master Keizan: 《景德傳燈錄》至南印度。彼國之人多信福業。聞尊者說妙法遮相謂曰。人有福業世間第一。徒言佛性誰能覩之。尊者曰。汝欲見佛性須除我慢。彼人曰。佛性大小。尊者曰。非大非小非廣非狹。無福無報不死不生。彼聞理勝悉迴初心。 (T 2076.51.210b1-6).

² and so on, down to (naishi 乃至). This expression indicates that part of this repetition of the Root Case has been elided to save space, but that the intention is to quote the entire thing.
Nāgārjuna then preached the dharma to him. Without arising from his seat, he manifested the sign of the moon’s orb. The Master spoke to the assembly, saying: “Here the Venerable manifests the substance and attributes of the buddha-nature, and thereby instructs us. How do we know this? Because the signless samādhi is like the shape of a full moon. The meaning of the buddha-nature is expansive, empty brightness.” When he finished speaking, the orb sign disappeared.

He returned to his original seat and recited a verse, saying:

His body manifests the sign of a perfectly round moon, thereby displaying the essence of buddhas.
The preaching of the dharma has no shape, which shows that it employs neither sound nor form.

Being like this, master and disciple are hard to separate; the vital bloodline passes through them.

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1. like Kāśyapa at Vulture Peak (Ryōzen no Kashō no gotoshi 霊山の迦葉の如し). Sakyamuni Buddha is said to have shared his seat with Mahākāśyapa to demonstrate that the latter was his leading disciple and dharma heir. According to the Tiansheng Era Record of the Spread of the Flame, the place where the Buddha shared his seat was the Stūpa of Many Sons, and that is what the Denkōroku itself says in Chapter 1. Here, however, the place is identified as Vulture Peak.

2. Without arising from his seat, he manifested the sign of the moon’s orb (za wo tatazu sbite gatsurin no só wo genze 座を起たずして月輪の相を現ず). The Shūmuchō edition of the Denkōroku (p. 98) defines “sign of the moon’s orb” (gatsurin no só 月輪の相) as the full moon, or the aspect of one entered into samādhi. The idea seems to be that Nāgārjuna transformed his own body into the form of a moon.
Investigation

The aforementioned episode is not typical. From the very first they [Nāgārjuna and Kānadeva] came to merge in the way. Nāgārjuna did not have a single word of explanation, and Kānadeva did not have a single word of questioning. Therefore, it is difficult to recognize master and disciple: how can guest and host be distinguished? Accordingly, Kānadeva in particular propagated the lineage style, so that eventually throughout the five regions of India it became known as the Deva Lineage. It was like the so-called “filling a silver bowl with snow, hiding an egret in the bright moon.”

Because this is so, when they met face to face for the first time, a bowl full of water was placed before the dharma seat. How can external and internal exist; how can inner and outer exist? The bowl was completely full, ultimately lacking nothing. Likewise, this was calm water, empty and clear. Thoroughly understood, it was entirely pure. Filled to the brim, it was numinously clear. Thus [Kānadeva] cast a single needle into it, and their understanding matched. It must have been clearly discerning from bottom to top. There is no “upright” and no “inclined.” Upon arriving at this point, master and disciple were difficult to distinguish. Although they

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1 “filling a silver bowl with snow, hiding an egret in the bright moon” (ginwan ni yuki wo mori, meigetsu ni ro wo kakusu 銀 盤 に 雪 を 盛 り 、 明 月 に 鷺 を 藏 す). A line of verse from the Jewel Mirror Samādhi. → “silver bowl filled with snow, bright moon hiding an egret.” The original Chinese saying reads: “Silver bowl filled with snow, bright moon hiding an egret” (C. yinwan sheng xue, mingyue zang lu 銀 盤 盛 雪 、 明 月 藏 鷺). The Japanese transcription (yomikudashi 読み下し) given in the Denkōroku slightly misconstrues the grammar of the original. This line is also quoted in Chapter 27 of the Denkōroku. The thrust of this metaphor in the present context is that Nāgārjuna and Kānadeva were barely distinguishable from one another.

2 no “upright” and no “inclined” (shō naku hen nashi 正 なく 偏 なし). → upright and/or inclined.
were the same type, there was no equating them; although they were mixed together, there were no traces of that.

The raising of eyebrows and blinking of eyes manifest this matter, and seeing forms and hearing sounds reveal this matter. Therefore, there is nothing to be called sound or form, and no seeing and hearing to be discarded. Fully clear and signless, it is like the vast spaciousness of clear water. It is like when one thoroughly understands the numinous principle and seeks a supernatural sword. One comes to bare the sword-tip in this place and that, then proceeds perfectly clearly to pass it through the mind. Water also flows through, piercing mountains and going on to soak the heavens. Needles also come to penetrate sacks and pierce mustard seeds. However, since water does not end up ripped apart by objects, how can it leave any traces in it? Needles also have a hardness in dealing with others¹ that exceeds even diamond.

perhaps the needle, being like a needle, is just the needle. When the needle is in the bowl, it is like the needle in the water. Similarly, the needle in the water is not the same as the needle, but it is still the same needle. And even though the needle is not the same, it is still the same needle. The needle in the water is like a needle in a needle. It is like when one thoroughly understands the numinous principle and seeks a supernatural sword. One comes to bare the sword-tip in this place and that, then proceeds perfectly clearly to pass it through the mind. Water also flows through, piercing mountains and going on to soak the heavens. Needles also come to penetrate sacks and pierce mustard seeds. However, since water does not end up ripped apart by objects, how can it leave any traces in it? Needles also have a hardness in dealing with others¹ that exceeds even diamond.

¹ in dealing with others (ta no tame ni 他の為に). It is not clear what “others” refers to in this context. The “other” could mean other things, such as sack cloth or mustard seeds, that a needle can penetrate better than a diamond, thanks to its very thin, sharp point. Or, the “other” could be Nāgārjuna, who initiated an exchange with Kanadeva by setting out a bowl of water. Kanadeva’s response was to drop a needle in the bowl, which temporarily disturbed the purity and stillness of the water, but communicated his understanding of Nāgārjuna’s intent. If the water symbolizes buddha-mind (i.e. original nature), then the needle thrown into it could represent acknowledgement of it (i.e. seeing the nature). Such an exchange, while nonverbal, still operates at the level of signs, which are ultimately false. Because the needle drops to the bottom of the bowl and leaves no trace in the water, however, it represents the most minimal and fleeting sort of signification of the ultimate failure of signs. That, in any case, seems to be the gist of Keizan’s explanation here.
As for this kind of needle and water, how could they be “other”? That is, they are your bodies and minds. When drinking it all in, it is only a single needle; when spitting it all out, again, it is pure water. Thus, the way of master and disciple merge, with absolutely no self or other. Thus, when their vital bloodlines flow and are truly transparent, it cannot be concealed anywhere within the ten directions. It is just like “spreading vines of the bottle gourd entangle the bottle gourd.” Climbing coming and climbing going,¹ there is only your own mind. Nevertheless, you must not merely understand the pure water but also must wake and feel it in detail and clarify that there is a needle at its bottom. If you swallow it by mistake, as a result it will come to injure your throat.

Although matters are like this, one must not form a dualistic understanding. All that is necessary is, while drinking in everything and spitting out everything, to think in detail and see what you see. Even if you perceive that things are pure, vacant and pervasive, in truth that would still be a concrete existent that extended everywhere.² There would be no³ assaults by the three disasters of flood, fire, and wind, and there would be no movement through the kalpas of formation, abiding, destruction, and emptiness.

Thus, in order to explicate this episode, I have some humble words. Great assembly, do you wish to hear them?

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¹ climbing coming and climbing going (yōji kitari yōji saru 撂来り撲去る). A play on the expression going and/or coming. Presumably the “climbing” referred to is that done by the vines of the bottle gourd.

² concrete existent that extended everywhere (C. kuoche jianggu 廓徹堅固; J. kakutetsu kengo). In other words, if one conceives of some thing that can be called “vacant and pervasive,” then that will be a dualistic understanding that will block one’s freedom of movement, as if empty space had congealed into a solid mass.

³ There would be no (koto naken ことなけん). The thrust of the argument here is that because, in fact, there are disasters, and there is movement through the four kalpas, there cannot be any kind of “concrete existent that extends everywhere” (C. kuoche jiangu 廓徹堅固; J. kakutetsu kengo).
**Verse on the Old Case**

一針釣盡滄溟水。獰龍到處難藏身。

The fishhook of a single needle uses up all the water of the ocean.
A ferocious dragon arrives at the place, his body difficult to conceal.