CHAPTER SEVEN (Dai nana shō 第七章)

Root Case 1【本則】

第七祖、婆須密多尊者、置酒器於彌遮迦尊者前、作禮而立。尊者問曰、為是我器、為是汝器。師思惟。尊者曰、為是我器者、汝之本有性。若復汝器、我法汝當受。師聞大悟無生本性。

The Seventh Ancestor, Venerable Vasumitra, placed a wine vessel before Venerable Miśraka, bowed courteously, and stood. The Venerable [Miśraka] said, “Is this my vessel, or is this your vessel?” The Master [Vasumitra] reflected on this. The Venerable [Miśraka] said, “If you regard it as my vessel, then this is your ‘originally existing nature.’" If, on the other hand, it is your vessel, then you should receive my dharma.” When the Master [Vasumitra] heard this he greatly awakened to the non-arising original nature.

Pivotal Circumstances【機縁】

師は北印度の人なり。姓は顚羅婆。常に浄衣を服す。手に酒器を持て閭里に遊行し、或は吟じ或は嘯く。人、之を狂と謂ふ。

1 Root Case (C. benze 本則; J. honsoku). The source of this Chinese passage is unknown.

2 wine vessel (C. jiuqi 酒器; J. shuki). A vessel, probably a bottle or jug with a stopper that is suitable for carrying around liquid without spilling, used to hold an alcoholic beverage such as beer or “wine” (C. jiu 酒; J. shu). The fifth rule in both the ten novice precepts for monks and nuns and the five precepts for Buddhist laymen and laywomen is “not to drink alcohol” (C. bu yinjiu 不飲酒; J. fu onju; S. suramereyya-majjapamādaṭṭhānāver). Vasumitra, who is said later in this chapter to have made free use of his wine vessel both day and night, is thus in clear violation of the moral rules.

3 "If you regard it as my vessel, then this is your ‘originally existing nature’” (C. wei shi wo qi zhe, ru zhi ben you xing 為是我器者、汝之本有性; J. kore waga utsuwa to nasaba, nanji no hon’u no shō nari 是れ我が器と為さば、汝の本有の性なり). The Japanese reading given here, and the English translation that accords with it, follows the Shūmuchō edition of the Denkōroku. However, it is also possible to translate ben you xing 本有性 as “truly having own-nature” (moto ni shō ga aru 本に性が有る). The latter makes more sense in this context because, if the wine vessel belongs to Venerable Miśraka, then that would mean that Vasumitra had given it to him as a gift, and to do so would betray a deluded belief in the own-nature of dharmas. If, however, it was not given as a gift (because Vasumitra understood the emptiness of dharmas), then it still belongs to Vasumitra, and he has proved himself a true vessel of the dharma, i.e. a disciple worthy of becoming a dharma heir. → original nature.
The Master [Vasumitra] was a man of North India, and his clan was Bhāradvāja. He always wore a pure robe. In his hand he carried a wine vessel as he wandered about the village, sometimes singing, sometimes whistling. People called him crazy.

He did not reveal his clan name. As it happened, Venerable Miśraka, when wandering about teaching, arrived in a country of North India. Looking over the city walls, he saw gold-colored auspicious clouds arising. The Venerable [Miśraka] addressed the congregation of followers, saying, “That is the qi of a person of the way. It is surely a great being who will become my dharma heir.”

He had not finished speaking those words when the Master [Vasumitra] arrived and asked,

1 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 “Seventh Ancestor, Vasumitra”:

《景德傳燈錄》北天竺國人也。姓頗羅墮。常服淨衣執酒器遊行里閈。或吟或嘯人謂之狂。(T 2076.51.208b11-13).

2 Venerable Miśraka (Mishaka Sonja 鏤遮迦尊者). 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 “Sixth Ancestor, Venerable Miśraka”:

《景德傳燈錄》遊化至北天竺國。見雉堞之上有金色祥雲。歎曰。斯道人氣也。必有大士為吾法嗣。(T 2076.51.208a16-18).

3 qi (氣). The original meaning of qi 氣 in Chinese is “breath,” “air,” “steam,” or “vapor”; hence the reference to “clouds” of an auspicious golden color. However, qi 氣 also came to refer to the invisible life-force, a vital energy that was present whenever someone was breathing, and dissipated at death.

4 asked (iwaku 曰く). The following question and answer 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 “Sixth Ancestor, Venerable Miśraka”:

《景德傳燈錄》曰識我手中物否。師曰。此是觸器而負浄者。(T 2076.51.208a21).
“Do you know what thing it is that I have in my hand?” The Venerable [Miśraka] said, “It is an unclean vessel, inappropriate for those who are pure.”

The Master [Vasumitra] thereupon

Placed a wine vessel before Venerable Miśraka... and so on, down to... greatly awakened to the non-arising original nature.

At that moment, suddenly, the wine vessel could no longer be seen. The Venerable [Miśraka] also

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1 thing (C. wu 物; J. matsu, mono). This word is key to understanding the passage, because the Chan/Zen tradition stands on the proposition that “from the start, there is not a single thing.” That saying, attributed to the Sixth Ancestor, Huineng, in the Platform Sūtra, expresses the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness. When Miśraka calls it an “unclean vessel,” there is a double meaning. The first, of course, is that a wine vessel is impure, and that having one is a violation of monastic precepts. The other meaning is that to believe in really existing “things” — i.e. dharmas that possess “own-nature” — is to “pollute” one’s own mind with deluded thinking.

2 The Master thereupon (Shi, sunawachi 師、乃ち). The block of text that follows these words is a quotation of this chapter’s Root Case.

3 and so on, down to (naisbi 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.

4 The Venerable also (Sonja mata 尊者又). 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 Jinge Era Record of the Transmission of the Flame under the heading “Sixth Ancestor, Venerable Miśraka”:

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addressed [Vasumitra], saying, “Try telling me your name, and I will then have to tell you the karmic cause." The Master [Vasumitra] replied by reciting a verse:

For innumerable kalpas,
until being born in this land,
my original clan has been Bhāradvāja,
and my name is Vasumitra.

At that time, the Venerable [Miśraka] instructed him, saying, “My master, Dhītika, told me that the World-Honored One, while traveling in North India long ago, spoke to Ānanda saying, ‘In this kingdom, three hundred years after my nirvāṇa, there will be a sage. His clan will be Bhāradvāja, his name will be Vasumitra, and he will surely become number seven among the Chan ancestors.’ The World-Honored One made a prediction concerning you. You should go forth from household life.” The Master [Vasumitra] listened and said, “As I think of past kalpas, I [recall that I] once was a donor and presented a tathāgata with a jeweled seat. That buddha gave me a prophecy, saying, ‘During the dharma of Śākyamuni Buddha in the kalpa of worthies you will succeed to a sagely position.’ As a result of this he came to join the succession as the Seventh Ancestor.

INVESTIGATION 【拈提】

Prior to the Master [Vasumitra] arriving in the presence of the Venerable [Miśraka], throughout the twelve periods of the day he held onto the wine vessel without ever discarding it. Truly it was his standard mark. That vessel, being needed in the morning and needed in the evening, was received

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1 karmic cause (C. benyn 本因; J. hon’in). That is to say, the past actions that led to the meeting of Vasumitra and Miśraka, or perhaps to the sudden disappearance of the wine vessel, in particular.
and used by him without obstruction. Truly it represented the fact that he was the “appropriate vessel.”1

On account of this, at the very start of his study, he [Vasumitra] asked, “Do you know what thing it is that I have in my hand?” Even if one understands that “mind is the way” and clarifies that “body is buddha,” this is still an unclean vessel. So, if it is an unclean vessel, it certainly should be eschewed by those who are pure.

You should also understand that this [critique] extends to the past and the present, and you should also know [that it applies to] “future completeness.”2 All of these [concepts] are unclean vessels. What “past” can we

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1 “appropriate vessel” (C. qi qi 其器; J. sono ki). There is an allusion here to a passage in the Analects of Confucius that speaks of the need for a ruler to select skilled people as ministers to carry out the work of government, acting on the principle of “humaneness” (C. ren 仁; J. jin):

Zigong asked about practicing humaneness. Confucius said, “A craftsman who wishes to do his work well must first prepare the appropriate vessels [i.e., his set of tools]. When you live in a state, serve the worthy among its leaders, and befriend the humane among its officials.”

The expression “appropriate vessel,” in this context, refers to able government ministers as vessels.

2 “future completeness” (C. weilai juzu 未来具足; J. mirai gusoku). There is an allusion here to a passage from the Sūtra of the Great Nirvāṇa:

The Buddha said, “Excellent, excellent, good sons, that you should quickly raise such a question! The buddha-nature is like empty space in that it is neither past, nor future, nor present. All living beings have three kinds of bodies: past, future, and present. For living beings, it is their bodies of the future, completely adorned with purity, that will be able to see the buddha-nature.

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speak of? What “present” can we speak of? What can we call “beginning,”
and what can we call “end”? Views such as these necessarily go against that
which is pure. Hearing the highest principle, the Master [Vasumitra] im-
mEDIATELY put down the wine vessel. This symbolized that he had taken
refuge in the Venerable [Miśraka].

On this account [Miśraka] asked, “Do you regard this as my vessel, or do
you regard it as your vessel?” This was no longer a matter of theorizing
about “past” or “present.” It also had nothing to do with views of going or
coming. Having arrived at this moment, would he regard it as “mine”? Would
he regard it as “yours”? Just as [Vasumitra was] thinking “it is not
mine” and “it is not yours,” [Miśraka] instructed him, saying, “If you re-
gard it as my vessel, then this is your [belief in] ‘originally existing nature’.”
That being so, it was not Miśraka’s vessel, either. “If, on the other hand, it
is your vessel, then you should receive my dharma.” Therefore, it was not
Vasumitra’s vessel, either. It is neither my nor your vessel. Thus, the vessel is
not a vessel. Thus, the vessel was hidden.

Truly this episode, singular from start to finish, is not something that peo-
dle these days can understand. Even if one inquires when coming and in-
quires when going, so that one reaches a place that no buddhas and no
ancestral teachers can reach even by expending all their powers, this is
an impure vessel. It certainly should be eschewed by those who are pure.
Those who are genuinely pure do not set up even purity. Thus, they do not
set up vessels, either. Thus, in the way of master and disciple, they match
tallies. Because it is the open route without obstruction, [Miśraka said:]
“You should receive my dharma.” Because it is “your originally existing
nature,” not a single dharma can be received from another and not a single dharma can be bestowed on another. When thoroughly investigating like this, [either] may be called “master” or called “disciple.” Thus, the disciple immediately rises to the master’s head, and the master immediately descends to the disciple’s feet. At that moment, both things cease to exist, and discrimination ceases, so that it is difficult to speak of a vessel. Thereupon, the vessel is hidden. This symbolizes the proper penetration of the way.

Today, if you are able to arrive at this standpoint, then you are not your former body and mind. Thus, it is also difficult to say “extend to the past and the present.” How much less can you refer to birth and death, or going and coming? Can skin, flesh, bones, and marrow even exist? Truly it is the standpoint of “a bit of chimeric absorption,” ultimately without front or back, interior or exterior.

Today again I have humble words that I would like to attach to the aforementioned episode. Great assembly, do you wish to hear them?

**Verse on the Old Case**

霜曉鐘如随扣響。斯中元不要空盞。

If the frosty dawn bell reverberates following each strike, then within it, from the start, there is no need of an empty cup.¹

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¹ *empty cup* (C. *kongzhan* 空盞; J. *kusen*). The “cup” (C. *zhan* 盞; J. *san*) referred to here, presumably, is the “wine vessel” that Vasumitra carried around and used before he met his teacher, Miśraka. The mention in the previous line of a “bell” (C. *zhong* 鐘; J. *shō, kane*) that is struck at dawn may have been inspired by the fact that large Chinese temple bells, made of bronze and lacking internal clappers, are shaped like inverted cups.