CHAPTER TWELVE (Dai jūni shō 第十二章)

Root Case1

The Twelfth Ancestor, Venerable Aśvaghosa, questioned Venerable Puṇyaśas, saying, “I want to know buddha; who is that?” The Venerable [Puṇyaśas] said, “If you want to know buddha, the one who does not know is it.” 2 The Master [Aśvaghosa] said, “If buddha is entirely not knowing, then how does one realize it?” The Venerable [Puṇyaśas] said, “You are entirely unknowing of buddha, so how do you realize the inconsistency [you just pointed out]?” The Master [Aśvaghosa] said, “This is what is meant by ‘sawing.’” The Venerable [Puṇyaśas] said, “That is what is meant by ‘wood.’” He [Puṇyaśas] also asked, “What do you mean by ‘sawing’?” The Master [Aśvaghosa] said, “Emerging as the equal of one’s master.” He [Aśvaghosa] also asked, “What do you mean by ‘wood’?” The Venerable [Puṇyaśas] said, “You have been released by me.” The Master [Aśvaghosa] broke open and had an introspective awakening.

1 Root Case (C. benze; 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 under the heading “Eleventh Ancestor, Puṇyaśas” (T 2076.51.209b13-18).

2 the one who does not know is it (C. bushi zhe shi 不識者是; J. fushiki sha ze; shirazaru mono kore nari). There are at least three ways to parse the Chinese grammar of this statement: (1) the “state” (C. zhe; J. koto) of “not knowing” (C. bushi 不識; J. fushiki) “is it” (C. shi is; J. ze) — i.e., is buddha; (2) the state of not knowing is “appropriate” (C. shi 是; J. ze) as a means of attaining the desired end of knowing buddha; or (3) the “one” (C. zhe; J. mono) who does not know — i.e. “you, Aśvaghosa” — is buddha. The English translation follows the third of these interpretations, because the Japanese transcription (yomikudashi 読み下し) of the sentence that appears below makes it clear that Keizan parsed the Chinese in that way. Later in the chapter, Keizan explicitly states that people who choose the first interpretation miss the point of Puṇyaśas’ instruction to Aśvaghosa.

3 meant by “sawing” (C. juyi 鋸義; J. kyo no gi). That is, the back-and-forth of the discussion is similar to the motion of sawing wood, presumably using a two-man saw that has a handle on both ends.
Pivotal Circumstances 【機縁】

師は  

The Master [Aśvaghoṣa]

波羅奈国の人なり。亦た功勝と名く。有作無作、諸の功德を以て最も殊勝と為すが故に名く。

was a man of the Country of Vārāṇasī. He was also named Superior in Merit. He was called that because his merit, both produced and unproduced, was regarded as the most excellent.

即ち夜奢尊者の處に参じて、最初に

He sought instruction at Venerable Punyayaśa’s place and right at the start

問て曰く、我れ佛を識らんと欲す。何者か即ち是なる。尊者曰く、汝ち佛を識らんと欲す、識らざる者是なりと

he asked: “I want to know buddha; who is that?” The Venerable [Punyayaśa] said, “You want to know buddha; the one who does not know it.”

INVESTIGATION 【拈提】

実に参學の最初、必ず尋ぬべきは足仏なり。三世の諸仏、数代の祖師、盡く足仏学仏の漢といふ。若し仏を模せば、悉く是れ外道と名く。故に音聲を以て求むべきに非ず、色相を以て求む識るべきに非ず。故に三十二相八十種好を以て佛とするに足らず。因て我れ佛を識らんと欲す。何者か即ち是なると問ひ来る。即ち示して曰く、汝ち佛を識らんと欲す、識らざる者是なりと。謂ひに識らざる者といふは正に足仏鳴尊者なり、豈他ならんや。

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 “Twelfth Ancestor, Aśvaghoṣa Bodhisattva”:

《景德傳燈錄》波羅奈國人也。亦名功勝。以有作無作諸功德最為殊勝故名焉。(T 2076.51.209c1-2).

2 right at the start (saisho ni 最初に). The block of text that follows these words is a partial quotation, in Japanese transcription (yomikudashi 読み下し), of the Chinese passage from the Jingde Era Record of the Transmission of the Flame that appears in the Root Case.
Truly, when you first begin studying, that which you must be sure to seek is this *buddha*. The *buddhas of the three times*, and the successive generations of ancestral teachers, are all called “fellows who study *buddha*.” Those who do not study *buddha* are all called *followers of other paths*. Therefore, you must not seek [buddha] by means of sound, and must not try to know [buddha] by means of visible form. Therefore, using the thirty-two marks and eighty pleasing features to regard [anything] as buddha is insufficient. It was for this reason that [Aśvaghoṣa] came to ask, “I want to know buddha; what is that?” [Puṇyayāsas] immediately instructed him, saying, “You want to know buddha; the one who does not know is it.” The “one who does not know” is precisely Venerable Aśvaghoṣa. How could it be anyone else?

At the time when one has yet to know, and also the time when one knows, there is no separate embodiment and there is no other way of being. Thus, from ancient times down to the present, it has only been like this. Sometimes [buddhas] bear the thirty-two marks, are equipped with the eighty pleasing features, have three heads and eight arms, or sink into the five signs of decline and eight kinds of suffering. Sometimes they are creatures with fur and horns, and sometimes they are fettered with iron shackles.1 Always residing in the three realms, they embody the conduct of their own selves. Appearing and disappearing within their own minds, they come wearing different faces. Therefore, even when they come in birth, we do not know “who it is.”2 Even when they go in death, we do not know “who it is.” Although we try to attach shapes [to them], these are not dharmas that can be fabricated. Although we try to settle on names, again, these are not matters that can be established. Therefore from kalpa to kalpa it is something still

---

1 fettered with iron shackles (C. tiedan jiasuo 鐵擔枷鎖; J. tettan kasa). The reference is probably to being bound and tortured in one of the hells.

2 “who it is” (nani mono nari 何者なり). This is Keizan’s rephrasing of Aśvaghoṣa’s question about buddha in the Root Case: “Who is that?” (C. hewu jishi 何物即是; J. nani mono ka sunawachi ze naru 何物か即ち是なる).
unknown. Even though it follows “me” and accompanies “me,” there is no discerning of it at all.

Hearing the aforementioned episode, many interpret it to mean: “No matter what one realizes, it is bound to differ from buddha. Not realizing anything and not distinguishing anything: that, truly, must be buddha.” But if you understand this case’s “not knowing” like this, then why would Venerable Punyayaśas have bothered to point it out as he did? He pointed it out directly, saying, “The one who does not know is it,” so that [Aśvaghoṣa] would not go on entirely in such a way, only moving like that from darkness into darkness.

Aśvaghoṣa, still unclear, simply took what is usually meant by “not conscious” and used it to interpret what was pointed out [by Punyayaśas] here. Thus he said, “If buddha is entirely not being conscious, then how does one know it?” The Venerable [Punyayaśas] instructed him again, saying, “If you are entirely unconscious of buddha, how do you know this is not buddha?” Apart from this, there is nothing to be sought. The “one who is not conscious” is precisely buddha. How could it be called “not it”?

The Master [Aśvaghoṣa] said, “This is the meaning of ‘sawing’.” The Venerable [Punyayaśas] said, “That is the meaning of ‘wood.’” Punyayaśas also asked, “What do you mean by ‘sawing’?” The Master [Aśvaghoṣa] said, “Emerging as the equal of one’s master.” Aśvaghoṣa also asked, “What do you mean by ‘wood’?” The Venerable [Punyayaśas] said, “You have been released by me.” The Master [Aśvaghoṣa] opened up and had an introspective awakening.

資に汝も是の知く、我も是の知し。八字に打開し、両手に分付す。汝も我也 一点を受ず。吾も汝も少分を假らず。之に依て平出せること恰も鎌の知し。
Truly, “You too are like this; I too am like this.”

1 “Fully opening his robe,” with both hands he [Punyayaśas] gave over his allotment. “You too” and “I too” do not suffer from even a single speck. 2 “You too” and “I too” do not depend on the smallest measure.

2 On account of that, his [Aśvaghosa’s] emerging as the equal was exactly like sawing. Thus he spoke of the “meaning of sawing.” The Master [Aśvaghosa] interpreted that, saying, “As for me, this is the meaning of wood.”

3 The Venerable [Punyayaśas] said, “That

1 “You too are like this; I too am like this” (nanji mo kaku no gotoku, ware mo kaku no gotoshi 汝も足の知く、我也足の知し) of words spoken by the Sixth Ancestor, Huineng, at the end of a famous dialogue in which he approved the understanding voiced by his disciple Nanyue Huairang 南嶽懷讓 (J. Nangaku Ejō; 677–744). → “You too are like this; I too am like this.”

2 “You too” and “I too” do not suffer from even a single speck (nanji mo ware mo itten wo ukezu 汝も我也一點を受ず). The start of this sentence echoes the preceding quotation of the Sixth Ancestor, Huineng. Thus “You too” and “I too” refer literally to Nanyue and his teacher Huineng, the “I” who is speaking. Metaphorically, “You too” and “I too” refer to Aśvaghosa and Punyayaśas, who stand in a similar relationship as disciple and teacher. The expression “not suffer from even a single speck” is a Japanese transcription (yomikudashi 読み下し) of a comment on a kōan that appears in the Extensive Record of Chan Master Hongzhi:

Without suffering from a single speck of dust, they suddenly meet each other on the road.


“Dust” in the context of Hongzhi’s saying means “deluded attachment.” In the dialogue between the Sixth Ancestor, Huineng, and his disciple Nanyue Huairang, the latter says, “Practice and verification are not absent, but I am not defiled by them,” whereas Huineng says, “You too are like this; I too am like this.” Given Keizan’s allusion to that dialogue, it is likely that what he means here by “do not suffer from even a single speck” is that neither Aśvaghosa nor Punyayaśas have “even a single speck” of the defilement that comes from attachment to practice and verification.

3 “You too” and “I too” do not depend on the smallest measure (nanji mo ware mo shōbun wo karazu 汝も我也少分を假らず). Again, this refers metaphorically to Aśvaghosa and Punyayaśas. It is not clear what the term “smallest measure” (shōbun 少分) refers to. Given Keizan’s allusion to the dialogue between Huineng and Nanyue Huairang (see previous note), however, the reference may be to the “smallest measure” of practice and verification.

4 The Master interpreted that, saying, “As for me, this is the meaning of wood” (Shi ge shite iwaku, ware wa kore ki no gi to 師解して曰く、吾は是れ木の義と). There is
is the meaning of ‘wood.’” If we ask what the reason is, it is because in “total darkness” there is nothing to be known throughout. Moreover, they [Punyayaśas and Aśvaghōsa] do not attach to “a single speck,” and they do not fake a bit of knowledge. They are just like blockheads, and like bare pillars.¹ Being mindless, they are “such.” In the end, there is nothing to be distinguished. Because he [Punyayaśas] understood matters in this way, he said, “That is the meaning of wood.”

Nevertheless, residual afflictions remain in such interpretations, and he did not know what the Master [Aśvaghōsa] meant. Here the Venerable Punyayaśas, because his compassion led him to enter the weeds, also asked, “What do you mean by ‘sawing’?” The Master [Aśvaghōsa] said, “Emerging as the equal of one’s master.” Arriving here and expressing himself again, he also asked, “What do you mean by ‘wood’?” Punyayaśas, in response, proffered his hands and gave over his allotment, saying, “You have been released by me.” At this point, he [Punyayaśas] moved through the way of master and disciple, smashed the passions of past and present, came building a road in the middle of a dream, and proceeded to walk in space. Thus he said, “You have been released by me.” Arriving here, the frozen state of [Aśvaghōsa’s] mindlessness quickly thawed, and he escaped

something wrong with the text here: this sentence contains an error of attribution, and it is made redundant by the following sentence, so it appears to be an erroneous interpolation. According to the dialogue in the Root Case and the subsequent repetition of it in Japanese, it was the Venerable Punyayaśas who said, “That is what is meant by ‘wood’” (kare wa kore ki no gi nari 彼は是れ木の義なり). Here, however, nearly identical words are put in the mouth of the “Master,” who in this chapter is Aśvaghōsa.

¹ like blockheads, and like bare pillars (mokutō no gotoku, mata rōchū no gotoshi 木頭の如く、又露柱の知し). Bare pillars in the buddha halls and dharma halls of Buddhist monasteries were made of wood. They are often used in Chan/Zen texts as examples of insentient objects, perhaps because monks would stand in lines next to them during religious services, giving the visual impression of two sorts of “pillars.”

² he did not know what the Master meant (Shi no gi wo shirazu 師の義を知らず). That is, Punyayaśas was not sure what Aśvaghōsa meant when the latter said “This is the meaning of ‘sawing.’”
from the burrow of obviousness.¹ He broke open and awakened, thereby joining the succession as the Twelfth Ancestor.

The Venerable [Puñyāśas] said to the congregation: “This great being [Aśvaghoṣa] long ago was the king of the Country of Vaiśālī. In that kingdom there was a tribe of people who went naked like horses. The king, utilizing his supernormal strength, divided his body into silkworms, so that they got clothing. That king was later born in Central India. The horse people missed him and cried sadly. On account of that he was named ‘Horse Cry.’² The Tathāgata had made a prediction, saying, ‘Six hundred years after my extinction, there will be a wise one known as Aśvaghoṣa. In the Country of Vārāṇasi, he will subjugate the followers of different paths and extensively deliver humans and gods. The people delivered will be innumerable. Having succeeded me, he will transmit the teachings.” Saying, “Now, surely that time has come,” Puñyāśas entrusted [Aśvaghoṣa] with the Tathāgata’s treasury of the true dharma eye.

Do not wantonly regard this place, singular from beginning to end, as a place of no consciousness and no experiencing, where one has no consciousness of various sense objects. That is to say, although it is “not consciousness,” if you take it as a state prior to entering a womb, even if you are able to see meticulously, think meticulously, and grope for the face of a buddha or the face of an ancestor, you will not get it. Even if you search for

¹ *burrow of obviousness* (myōbyaku no kakutsu 明白の窠窟). The term “burrow” is a metaphor for a narrow, constricted point of view. For matters to be “clear,” “evident,” or “obvious” (C. mingbai 明白; J. myōbyaku) would seem to be the opposite of that, but in this case believing that one sees things clearly is compared to a “burrow.”

² “Horse Cry” (C. Maming 馬鳴; J. Memyō). The Chinese name is a literal translation of the Sanskrit words for “sound” or “cry” (ghoṣa) and “horse” (aśva), which in English would normally be called a “whinny” or “neighing.”
a person, demon, or beast, you will not get it. It is not unchanging, nor is it something one moves, nor is it something empty. There is no question of inner or outer, and no division between upright and inclined.

When one perceives and knows that this is truly the original face of one’s own self, even if it appears as an ordinary or sagely sentient being, and even if it splits among primary and secondary karmic recompense, it goes and comes entirely herein, and it arises and ceases entirely herein. It is just like the arising of waves on the surface of the ocean: even when they rise higher and higher, there is no increase in water. Likewise, it is just like the ceasing of waves. Even as they die down more and more, not a single drop is lost. Moreover, whether among humans or in the heavens, it is temporarily called buddhas, or called demons or beasts. It is just like a multitude of faces that provisionally appear upon a single face. To regard this as a buddha’s face is incorrect, and to regard it as a demon’s face is incorrect.

However, the “matter of building the gate of conversion” comes through hitting and shouting. When one truly practices the samādhi of recognizing illusion, one comes to conduct buddha-activities in the middle of a dream. Based on this, the Western Lands’ techniques of illusion for converting and leading have been propagated across the three countries, down to the present without being cut off, and have transformed ordinary people into sages. Skillfully engaging like this in transformative practice, naturally one does not stand apart from the transgressions of one’s own self, nor is one confused by the birth and death of one’s own self. This is a genuine patched-robed monk.

Today, in presenting the aforementioned episode, as is customary I have some humble words. Do you wish to hear them?
Verse on the Old Case1【頌古】

野村紅不桃華識。更教靈雲到不疑。
The crimson flowers of the farming village were not conscious of being peach blossoms,
but still they taught Lingyun to arrive at doubtlessness.

---

1 *Verse on the Old Case* (C. *songgu* 頌古; J. *juko*). This verse alludes to the story of Chan Master Lingyun Zhiqin (J. Reiun Shigon 靈雲志勤; d.u.), who is said to have been awakened suddenly when he looked at a village from afar and saw peach trees in bloom there. He wrote a verse about reaching “doubtlessness” (C. *buyi* 不疑; J. *fugi*) upon “seeing peach blossoms” (C. *jian taohua* 見桃華; J. *ken tōka*), presented it to his teacher Dawei 大潙 (J. Daiki; d.u.), and received the latter’s approval as a dharma heir. → Lingyun Zhiqin.