

CHINESE ZEN MASTERS

Lecture 5: Founding Patriarchs of the Caodong House

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In lecture 4 we introduced three important Chan masters that culminated in the Linji (Rinzai in Japanese) House. Of also great influence is the Caodong (J. Soto). We now introduce the lineage of masters that led to the foundation patriarchs of Caodong.

Founding Patriarchs of the Caodong House

1 Master Yaoshan Weiyao (751-834) 藥山惟儼 —The Clouds in the Blue Sky

Chan Master Yaoshan Weiyao's secular last name was Han. He became a monk at 17, studied with a Vinaya master and followed the precepts rigorously. He also acquired vast knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures. However, Weiyao became frustrated with the repetitiveness and meticulous rules and yearned for the ultimate truth. He visited the great masters Shitou and Mazu and achieved enlightenment with the help of both. His noted Dharma heirs include Yunyan (who would be the master of Dongshan, founder of the Caodong House), Daowu (道吾), the "Boat Monk" Decheng (who chose to ferry people by a river), and Novice Gao (who never took full ordination). He was honored with the posthumous title Hongdao (弘道, widely spreading the Tao) from Emperor Wenzong of Tang Dynasty.

Mosquito on an Iron Bull 蚊子上鐵牛

One day, Yaoshan sighed, "A great man should purify oneself by being detached from all dharmas, who can worry about all these fine details regarding robes and clothing?" Therefore he left to visit the great Chan Master Shitou ("The Rock"). On their first meeting he asked the Master, "I have a general understanding of the Three Vehicles and Twelve Canons, but I heard that in the south they teach this 'directly pointing at the mind, realizing one's true nature and become a Buddha,' which I really don't understand. May the venerable be kind enough to instruct me on this?"

Master Shitou said, "to be this way is not it, to not be this way is not it, this way, that way, it's just not it. What do you say?"

Yaoshan had no idea. Master Shitou said, "Your affinity is not at this place. You should go see Master Mazu." Yaoshan obeyed and paid his respects to Master Mazu, and then asked the same question.

Mazu said, "Sometimes I teach it by raising my eyebrows and blinking my eyes, sometimes I

don't teach it by raising my eyebrows and blinking my eyes. Sometimes to raise eyebrows and blink eyes is it, sometimes they are not it. What do you say?" With those words Yaoshan was awakened and then bowed to the master. Mazu said, "What did you see that make you bow?"

Yaoshan replied, "When I was at Shitou's place, it was like a mosquito trying to sting an iron bull."

Master Mazu affirmed his realization, "So it is, uphold and sustain it well."

Yaoshan attended Master Mazu for three years. One day, Mazu asked him, "What is your understanding these days?"

Yaoshan replied, "all the skins have shed, only the truth remains."

Master Mazu gave his consent for Yaoshan to teach as a Chan Master. However, Yaoshan returned to stay with Master Shitou, and took on Shitou's lineage.

澧州藥山惟儼禪師，絳州韓氏子。年十七，依潮陽西山慧照禪師出家，納戒于衡嶽希操律師。博通經論，嚴持戒律。一日，自歎曰：「大丈夫當離法自淨，誰能屑屑事細行於布巾邪？」首造石頭之室，便問：「三乘十二分教某甲粗知，嘗開南方直指人心，見性成佛。實未明了，伏望和尚慈悲指示。」頭曰：「恁麼也不得，不恁麼也不得，恁麼不恁麼總不得。子作麼生？」師罔措。頭曰：「子因緣不在此，且往馬大師處去。」師稟命恭禮馬祖，仍伸前問。祖曰：「我有時教伊揚眉瞬目，有時不教伊揚眉瞬目，有時揚眉瞬目者是，有時揚眉瞬目者不是。子作麼生？」師於言下契悟，便禮拜。祖曰：「你見甚麼道理便禮拜？」師曰：「某甲在石頭處，如蚊子上鐵牛。」祖曰：「汝既如是，善自護持。」侍奉三年。一日，祖問：「子近日見處作麼生？」師曰：「皮膚脫落盡，唯有一真實。」

Doing Nothing 一物不為

One day Yaoshan was sitting on a rock. Master Shitou asked, "What are you doing here?"

Yaoshan replied, "Doing nothing (wu-wei)"

"Then you're sitting idly."

"To sit idly would be doing something."

"You said doing nothing, what is it that you're not doing?"

"What a thousand sages cannot recognize."

Master Shitou praised him with a poem,

Always lived together with that which is nameless,

Getting by effortlessly, acting in suchness.

Not even the ancient sages recognize it,

How can a mere mortal understand it?

Later Master Shitou said, "Words and actions are completely irrelevant."

Youshan replied, "No words and no actions are also irrelevant."

"At my place not even a needle can get through."

"At my place I'm planting flowers on a rock."

Master Shitou nodded in approval. Later on Weiyuan presided over a monastery in Mount Yao of the Li Prefecture, where many disciples gathered, and therefore was known as Master Yaoshan.

一日在石上坐次，石頭問曰：「汝在這裡作麼？」曰：「一物不為。」頭曰：「恁麼即閑坐也。」曰：「若閑坐即為也。」頭曰：「汝道不為，不為個甚麼？」曰：「千聖亦不識。」頭以偈讚曰：「從來共住不知名，任

運相將祇麼行。自古上賢猶不識，造次凡流豈可明？」後石頭垂語曰：「言語動用沒交涉。」師曰：「非言語動用亦沒交涉。」頭曰：「我這裡針劄不入。」師曰：「我這裡如石上栽華。」頭然之。後居澧州藥山，海眾雲會。

To Flourish or to Wither 枯是榮是

The disciples Daowu and Yunyan stood in attendance to the master. Master Yaoshan pointed to two trees, one flourishing and one withering, and asked Daowu, “Better to flourish or to wither?”

Daowu replied, “To flourish.”

The master said, “Shining everywhere, bright and glorious.” Then, he asked Yunyan, “Better to flourish or to wither?”

Yunyan replied, “To wither.”

The master said, “Shining everywhere, let it wither and fade.”

Another disciple, Novice Gao suddenly came, and the master asked him also.

Gao replied, “Let the withering one wither, let the flourishing one flourish.”

The master looked at both Daowu and Yunyan and said, “wrong, wrong.”

道吾、雲巖侍立次，師指案山上枯榮二樹，問道吾曰：「枯者是，榮者是？」吾曰：「榮者是。」師曰：「灼然一切處，光明燦爛去。」又問雲巖：「枯者是，榮者是？」巖曰：「枯者是。」師曰：「灼然一切處，放教枯淡去。」高沙彌忽至，師曰：「枯者是，榮者是？」彌曰：「枯者從他枯，榮者從他榮。」師顧道吾、雲巖曰：「不是，不是。」

You Talk Too Much 「佛」是什麼字

The master wrote the word “Buddha” and asked Daowu, “What is this word?”

Daowu said, “It’s ‘Buddha.’”

The master said, “Chatty monk!”

師書「佛」字，問道吾：「是甚麼字？」吾曰：「佛字。」師曰：「多口阿師！」

Buddha Bathing 浴佛

The monk Zun was bathing the Buddha. The master said, “You can bath this, but can you bath *that*?”

Zun said, “Bring *that* to me.”

The master quit.

遵布衲浴佛。師曰：「這個從汝浴，還浴得那個麼？」遵曰：「把將那個來。」師乃休。

Clouds in the Sky 雲在青天水在瓶

The governor Lee Ao yearned for Master Yaoshan’s profound teachings and repeatedly invited him to his office without success. Finally he paid the master a visit in person. When his arrival was announced, the master kept on reading a sutra and paid no attention to him. Lee was quick-tempered and said, “In person, you do not match your reputation.” He flicked his sleeves and started to walk out. Just then the master said, “Why do you value your ears more than your eyes?”

Lee turned back and greeted in apology, and asked, “What is the Way?”

The master pointed up and pointed down and said, “Understand?”

Lee said, “No.”

The master said, “The clouds are in the sky, the water is in the bottle.”

Lee joyfully bowed.

李初嚮師玄化，屢請不赴，乃躬謁師。師執經卷不顧，侍者曰：「太守在此。」李性褻急，乃言曰：「見面不如聞名。」拂袖便出，師曰：「太守！何得貴耳賤目？」李回拱謝。問曰：「如何是道？」師以手指上下，曰：「會麼？」翻曰：「不會。」師曰：「雲在青天水在瓶。」翻欣然作禮。

The Hall is Collapsing 法堂倒

When the master was near passing, he yelled, “The Dharma Hall is collapsing! The Dharma Hall is collapsing!” People ran to get poles to prop up the hall. The master lifted his hand and said, “You don’t understand what I mean,” and was gone.

師臨順世，叫曰：「法堂倒！法堂倒！」眾皆持拄撐之。師舉手曰：「子不會我意。」乃告寂。

Want to Know Hell?

Do you want to know hell? It is what you cook and fry in the pan. Want to know hungry ghosts? They are those now who are more often phony than truthful and are untrustworthy. Want to know the animals? They are those now who don’t care about kindness and justice, who turn against their own friends. You don’t have to actually become one wearing feathers and horns, hanging by their feet and being chopped up. Want to know the human and heavenly realms? They are those now who act with purity and propriety, holding the bottles and the bowls. To ensure against falling into one of the wretched destinies, you should never abandon *this*. *This* is not easy to attain, one needs to *stand on top of the highest mountain, and walk on the bottom of the deepest ocean*. To be able to practice this with persistence, then one will be slightly in accord with the Way. People nowadays are all too busy. Can’t find an ignorant and dull guy though I tried. Don’t just remember the words from books and take that to be your own understanding, someone who look down on those who don’t get it. Such persons are all hopeless heretics. This mentality misses the point altogether. Do inspect carefully. What I’ve said is still on the verge of the Triple Realm. Don’t wear the monastic robes in vain. It is extremely subtle; don’t think that it is ordinary. Take good care.

你欲識地獄道，只今鑊湯煎煮者是。欲識餓鬼道，即今多虛少實，不令人信者是。欲識畜生道，見今不識仁義，不辨親疏者是。豈須披毛戴角，斬割倒懸。欲識人天，即今清淨威儀，持瓶挈鉢者是。保任免隨諸趣，第一不得棄這個。這個不是易得，須向高高山頂立，深深海底行，此處行不易，方有少相應。如今出頭來，盡是多事人，覓個癡鈍人不可得。莫只記策子中言語，以為自己見知。見他不解者，便生輕慢。此盡是關提外道，此心直不中。切須審悉。恁麼道，猶是三界邊事。莫在衲衣下空過。到這裏更微細在，莫將謂等閒，須知珍重。

2 Master Yunyan Tansheng (782-841) 雲巖曇晟 Eyes All Over

Master Tansheng became a monk very young, and practiced with Master Baizhang for twenty years until the master passed away. He then visited many teachers and finally achieved awakening under Yaoshan Weiyan. Later on he lived on Yunyan Mountain, near modern Changsha. He was a

close friend of fellow Dharma practitioner Daowu Yuanzhi, and their many exchanges were frequently quoted by later generation Zen students. He passed away in the year Wuzong ascended the throne, the emperor who immediately began a series of policies to destroy Buddhism in China. Yunyan's most important disciple is Dongshan, founding patriarch of the Caodong House.

To Meet Baizhang

Yunyan became a monk at a young age, and practiced with Master Baizhang Huaihai for twenty years, without much success. Later on he visited Master Yaoshan, who asked Yunyan, "What did Baizhang teach the disciples?"

Yunyan said, "He often says, 'I have a phrase, it has all the flavors.'"

Master Yaoshan said, "Something salty is salty, something bland is bland, something that is neither is normal flavor. What is the phrase with all the flavors?"

Yunyan had no reply. Yaoshan said, "And what has that got to do with the issue of life and death before your eyes?"

Yunyan said, "Before my eyes there is no life and death."

Master Yaoshan said, "How long were you at Master Baizhang's place?"

"Twenty years."

"Twenty years at Baizhang's, and you still haven't rid of your worldly habits."

Another time the master asked, "What else did Baizhang teach?"

Yunyan said, "Sometimes when the disciples had stood assembled, the master would enter the Dharma Hall and only to swing his cane and disperse them at once. And then he would call out, 'What is it?'"

Master Yaoshan said, "Why didn't you say that earlier! Now I got to meet Dharma brother Huaihai because of you." With those words Yunyan suddenly had a realization, and bowed to Yaoshan.

少出家於石門，參百丈海禪師二十年，因緣不契。後造藥山，山問：「甚處來？」曰：「百丈來。」山曰：「百丈有何言句示徒？」師曰：「尋常道：我有一句子，百味具足。」山曰：「鹹則鹹味，淡則淡味，不鹹不淡是常味。作麼生是百味具足底句？」師無對。山曰：「爭奈目前生死何！」師曰：「目前無生死。」山曰：「在百丈多少時？」師曰：「二十年。」山曰：「二十年在百丈，俗氣也不除。」他日山又問：「更說甚麼法？」師曰：「有時上堂，大眾立定，以拄杖一時趁散。復召大眾，眾回首。丈曰：『是甚麼？』」山曰：「何不早恁麼道，今日因子得見海兄。」師於言下頓省，便禮拜。

Not a Word

Master Yunyan ascended the Dharma Platform and addressed the monks, "There's a certain chap; there is no question he can't answer."

Dongshan came forth and asked, "How many books are there in his house?"

"Not a single word."

"Then how can he be so knowledgeable?"

"He doesn't sleep day or night."

"Can one ask him something?"

"What he answers is not spoken."

上堂示眾曰：「有個人家兒子，問著無有道不得底。」洞山出問曰：「他屋裡有多少典籍？」師曰：「一字也無。」曰：「爭得怎麼多知？」師曰：「日夜不曾眠。」山曰：「問一段事還得否？」師曰：「道得卻不道。」

Zen Master Rudeness

Disciple: Is the person who's doing the practice of profound *keep-thus* (*bao-ren*) the same as *that* or different?

Master: Like the pieces of silk cloth cut from the weaving machine, are they the same or different? (Later, Dongshan answered, "Like a tree from an aerial root.")

問：「大保任底人，與那個是一是二？」師曰：「一機之絹，是一段是兩段？」〔洞山代云：「如人接樹。」〕

* Bao-ren: A Zen term that refers to the practice after one has achieved awakening. Then the practitioner, having penetrated the delusions and seen the truth, need to guard against delusive thoughts and habitual behavior that still may come up frequently due to lifetimes of conditioning. One literally keeps the mind in *thusness* or suchness, *the way it is*.

1000 Eyes

Daowu: The Great Compassionate Guanyin has 1000 eyes and hands, which one is the true eye?

Master Yunyan: It's like someone reaching behind his back to get his pillow at night.

D: I got it.

M: What did you understand?

D: He has hands and eyes all over his body.

M: Quite, but you only got 80%.

D: How would you put it, Dharma brother?

M: The entire body is the hand and the eye.

道吾問：「大悲千手眼，那個是正眼？」師曰：「如人夜間背手摸枕头。」吾曰：「我會也。」師曰：「作麼生會？」吾曰：「遍身是手眼。」師曰：「道也太煞道，祇道得八成。」吾曰：「師兄作麼生？」師曰：「通身是手眼。」

80 Year Old Father

A nun bowed to the master.

M: Is your dad still alive?

N: Yes.

M: How old is he?

N: 80 years old.

M: You have a "father" who is not 80, do you know?

N: Isn't he the one that come from suchness!?

M: The one that come from suchness is still the offspring.

尼僧禮拜，師問：「汝爺在否？」曰：「在。」師曰：「年多少？」曰：「年八十。」師曰：「汝有個爺不年八十，還知否？」曰：「莫是怎麼來者！」師曰：「怎麼來者，猶是兒孫。」

3 Master Dongshan Liangjie (807-869): 洞山良价

Master Dongshan was born in ancient Guiji 會稽, in modern day Zhejiang Province. When he was young, he read the Heart Sutra where it says, “There is no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind ...” and asked his teacher, “I have eyes, ears, nose, and so on, why does the sutra say there isn’t any?” The teacher was dumbfounded and said, “I’m not fit to be your teacher.” He sent the young prodigy to Master Lingmo, and Liangjie received full ordination at 21. He wrote a touching and inspiring farewell letter to his family and his wife, vowing to achieve the highest enlightenment as the only way to repay their kindness. A well-quoted phrase from the letter was “if I don’t try to achieve liberation this life, when will it ever be the time to get liberated?”

From records of his sayings, we see that Liangjie was very sharp, inquisitive, and uncompromising regarding seeking the truth. He traveled extensively to study with the great masters of the time, gaining spiritual insights along the way, and eventually attaining great awakening when he was crossing a stream. Later on he resided in Dong Mountain and was known as Master Dongshan. His teaching was profound, intricate, with finely woven sets of devices such as the Five Ranks, Three Leakages, Three Paths, etc., which were explained and applied extensively by his eminent heir Caoshan. Together they were considered the founding patriarchs of the Caodong House. Caodong is the only other House of Zen, together with Linji, to have continued its lineage to today.

The famous Japanese Zen Master Dōgen (1200-1253) was trained and enlightened under Caodong master Tientong Rujing. He went back and became the founding master of Japanese Soto Zen. In the 20th century, it was primarily Soto teachers from Japan that introduce Zen to the west.

Master Dongshan’s Enlightenment

1. With Master Nanquan

Dongshan first practiced with Master Nanquan. Once Nanquan asked the assembly, “Soon it will be the anniversary memorial service for Master Mazu. I wonder if Mazu will be here at the meal offering?” None had an answer.

Dongshan came forth and said, “He will if he has a companion.”

Master Nanquan said, “Though he is a novice, he is a gem worthy of polishing.”

Dongshan said, “Master, please do not ruin a good man.”

2. With Master Guishan: The Nonsentient Expounds the Dharma

Dongshan next visited Master Guishan, and asked him, “I’ve heard that the National Teacher Huizhong taught that the nonsentient can expound the Dharma, I don’t understand the intricate meaning of this teaching.”

Master Guishan said, “Do you remember the dialog?”

“Yes.”

“Tell it again.”

Dongshan then repeated the following dialog:

A monk asked, "What is the mind of the ancient Buddha?"

The National Teacher replied, "The wall and the rubble."

"Aren't the wall and the rubble nonsentient?"

"Yes."

"Can they expound the Dharma?"

"They speak very clearly and never stop."

"Why can't I hear it?"

"You don't hear it, that doesn't prevent others from hearing it."

"Who can hear it?"

"The holy sages can hear it."

"Do you hear it, master?"

"I don't"

"If the master doesn't hear it, how can you know that the nonsentient can expound the Dharma?"

"It's fortunate that I don't hear it; if I did, I'd be the equal of the saints, then you won't hear me expounding the Dharma."

"Well then it's hopeless for ordinary beings."

"I speak to the ordinary beings, not to the holy sages."

"What happens after ordinary beings hear it?"

"Then they are no longer ordinary beings."

"According to what scriptures is this teaching of the nonsentient expounding the Dharma?"

"Indeed, a noble one should not speak without references to scriptures. Haven't you seen in the Avatamsaka Sutra that says, 'The world speaks, ordinary beings speak, everything in the three periods of time speak.'"

When Dongshan was done, Master Guishan said, "I have this teaching too, but rare is one who can appreciate it."

Dongshan said, "I don't understand; I beg the master to instruct me."

Guishan lifted up his whisk, "Understand?"

"No, please explain to me."

"The mouth that came from my parents will never explain it to you."

"Are there someone else who follow the Way like you, master?"

"Go to You County in Liling, where there are stone houses connected together, there is a cultivator of the Way named Yunyan. If you can step through the grass and face the breeze (i.e. are undaunted by the difficulties and pay respects to the master), you won't be disappointed."

Dongshan then bid farewell to Guishan and found Master Yunyan. He recounted the previous koan and asked, "Who can hear the nonsentient things expounding the Dharma?"

"The nonsentient can."

"Do you hear it, master?"

"If I did, you wouldn't hear me expounding the Dharma."

“Why can’t I hear it?”

Yunyan lifted up his whisk and said, “Do you hear it?”

“No.”

“You can’t even hear me expounding the Dharma, how can you hear the nonsentient?”

“According to what scriptures is this teaching of the nonsentient speaking the Dharma?”

“Haven’t you seen in the Amitabha Sutra which says, ‘The water, the birds, the forests all chant the Buddha and the Dharma?’”

Dongshan came to a realization, and said a verse:

How incredible! How incredible!

It’s inconceivable that the nonsentient expounds the Dharma!

You will never understand if you listen with your ears;

You will only know when you hear it with your eyes.

3. Karmic Habits

Dongshan told Master Yunyan, “I still have karmic habits that are not rid of yet.”

Yunyan said, “What have you been practicing?”

“I don’t even practice the Noble Truths.”

“Are you joyous?”

“It is not without joy; it is like finding a pearl in a heap of dung.”

“

4. I See It Everywhere

One day Dongshan said goodbye to Master Yunyan. Yunyan asked, “Where are you going?”

“Although I’m leaving the master, I don’t know where I’ll end up.”

“Aren’t you going to Hunan?”

“No.”

“Going to your native place?”

“No.”

“When will you be back?”

“When you have a place to stay (i.e. heading a monastery) then I’ll be back.”

“Now that we part, it’ll be difficult to meet again.”

“It’ll be difficult not to meet again.”

As Dongshan was departing, he asked the master, “After a hundred years (i.e. when the master has passed away), if someone asks, ‘Have you seen the real master?’ how should I answer?”

After a long pause, Yunyan said, “Just this is it.”

Dongshan hesitated. Yunyan said, “Venerable Jie! To be able to take on this great affair, you need to be very careful and meticulous.”

Dongshan still had doubts. Later when he crossed a stream and saw his reflection in the water, he had a great awakening and understood Yunyan’s meaning. He composed this verse:

Never seek from another, that will just take you astray further;

Now I walk alone, and I see it everywhere.

It is exactly me, yet I am not it now.

One must understand this to merge with thusness.

師首詣南泉，值馬祖諱辰修齋。泉問眾曰：「來日設馬祖齋，未審馬祖還來否？」眾皆無對。師出對曰：「待有伴即來。」泉曰：「此子雖後生，甚堪雕琢。」師曰：「和尚莫壓良為賤。」次參為山，問曰：「頃聞南陽忠國師有無情說法話，某甲未究其微。」為曰：「闍黎莫記得麼？」師曰：「記得。」為曰：「汝試舉一遍看。」師遂舉：「僧問：『如何是古佛心？』國師曰：『牆壁瓦礫是。』僧曰：『牆壁瓦礫，豈不是無情？』國師曰：『是。』僧曰：『還解說法否？』國師曰：『常說熾然，說無間歇。』僧曰：『某甲為甚麼不聞？』國師曰：『汝自不聞，不可妨他聞者也。』僧曰：『未審甚麼人得聞？』國師曰：『諸聖得聞。』僧曰：『和尚還聞否？』國師曰：『我不聞。』僧曰：『和尚既不聞，爭知無情解說法？』國師曰：『賴我不聞，我若聞，即齊於諸聖，汝即不聞我說法也。』僧曰：『恁麼則眾生無分去也。』國師曰：『我為眾生說，不為諸聖說。』僧曰：『眾生聞後如何？』國師曰：『即非眾生。』僧曰：『無情說法，據何典教？』國師曰：『灼然言不該典，非君子之所談。汝豈不見華嚴經云：剎說、眾生說、三世一切說。』師舉了，為曰：「我這裡亦有，祇是罕遇其人。」師曰：「某甲未明，乞師指示。」為瀉起拂子曰：「會麼？」師曰：「不會，請和尚說。」為曰：「父母所生口，終不為子說。」師曰：「還有與師同時慕道者否？」為曰：「此去灑陵攸縣，石室相連，有雲巖道人，若能撥草瞻風，必為子之所重。」師遂辭為山，徑造雲巖，舉前因緣了，便問：「無情說法，甚麼人得聞？」雲巖云：「無情得聞。」師云：「和尚聞否？」雲巖云：「我若聞，汝即不聞吾說法也。」師云：「某甲為甚麼不聞？」雲巖豎起拂子云：「還聞麼？」師云：「不聞。」雲巖云：「我說汝尚不聞，豈況無情說法乎？」師云：「無情說法，該何典教？」雲巖云：「豈不見《彌陀經》云：『水鳥樹林悉皆念佛念法。』」師於此有省，乃述偈云：「也大奇！也大奇！無情說法不思議。若將耳聽終難會，眼處聞聲方得知。」師問雲巖：「某甲有餘習未盡。」雲巖云：「汝曾作甚麼來？」師云：「聖諦亦不為。」雲巖云：「還歡喜也未？」師云：「歡喜則不無，如糞掃堆頭拾得一顆明珠。」師辭雲巖，雲巖云：「甚麼處去？」師云：「雖離和尚，未卜所止。」雲巖云：「莫湖南去？」師云：「無。」云：「莫歸鄉去？」師云：「無。」云：「早晚卻回？」師云：「待和尚有住處即來。」云：「自此一別，難得相見。」師云：「難得不相見。」臨行，又問：「百年後，忽有人問：『還邈得師真否？』如何祇對？」雲巖良久云：「祇這是。」師沈吟。雲巖云：「价闍黎！承當個事，大須審細。」師猶涉疑，後因過水睹影，大悟前旨，有偈云：「切忌從他覓，迢迢與我疏。我今獨自往，處處得逢渠。渠今正是我，我今不是渠。應須恁麼會，方得契如如。」

Killing Question

Master Dongshan was at Lake Le (Monastery) and heard that the head monk Chu had a saying, “How incredible! How incredible! The Buddhist realm and the Taoist realm are inconceivable.”

Master Dongshan then asked him, “Putting aside (the issue) of Buddhist and Taoist realms, who is the person that speaks of Buddhist and Taoist realms?”

Chu had no answer after a long while.

Dongshan said, “Why don’t you answer quickly?”

“To hurry is not the right way.”

“You haven’t said anything, what is this about hurrying is not the right way?”

Chu had no answer.

Dongshan said, “Buddhist and Taoism are both names, why don’t you reference the scriptures?”

“What do the scriptures say?”

“Getting the meaning one forgets the words.”

“The meaning of the teaching stays on your mind like an illness.”

“How serious is the illness of the one who talks about Buddhist and Taoist realms?”

Again Chu had no answer; the next day he suddenly died. After that Master Dongshan gained a reputation as “the one who killed the head monk with his questions.”

師在泐潭，見初首座有語曰：「也大奇，也大奇。佛界道界不思議。」師遂問曰：「佛界道界即不問，祇如說佛界道界底是甚麼人？」初良久無對。師曰：「何不速道？」初曰：「爭即不得。」師曰：「道也未曾道，說甚麼爭即不得？」初無對。師曰：「佛之與道，俱是名言，何不引教？」初曰：「教道甚麼？」師曰：「得意忘言。」初曰：「猶將教意向心頭作病在。」師曰：「說佛界道界底病大小？」初又無對。次日忽遷化，時稱師為「問殺首座价」。

The Price for Fruits

Master Dongshan was eating fruits with the head monk Tai, and asked him, “There is something that reaches up to the sky and down to the earth, pitch black, always in motion, yet motions cannot confine it. What is the problem?”

Tai said, “Its problem is being in motion.”

The master called the attendant to take away the fruits table.

The Master in the Master

Master Dongshan asked a monk, “What is your name?”

“So-and-so.”

“But who is your real master?”

“Just this who is facing you and answering you.”

“How dreadful! How dreadful! People these days are all like this, taking (the slave) who follows the donkeys and horses to be the self; this is the reason for the decline of Buddhism. Not even knowing the master in the guest, how can you recognize the master in the master?”

“What is the master in the master?”

“You tell me, Venerable!”

“If I could, that would be the master in the guest. What is the master in the master?”

“It’s easy to say it like this, but to continue it is very difficult.” Then the master composed a verse:

*It’s a grieving to see the cultivators of today,
Thousands of them only know the entrance.
It is like meeting the sagely king in the capital,
Yet stopping at the Tong Gate at the border.*

師問僧：「名甚麼？」僧云：「某甲。」師云：「阿那個是闍黎主人公？」僧云：「見祇對次。」師云：「苦哉！苦哉！今人例皆如此，祇認得驢前馬後底將為自己，佛法平沈，此之是也。賓中主尚未分，如何辨得主中主？」僧云：「如何是主中主？」師云：「闍黎自道取。」僧云：「某甲道得，即是賓中主。如何是主中主？」師云：「恁麼道即易，相續也大難。」遂示頌云：「嗟見今時學道流，千千萬萬認門頭，恰似入京朝聖主，祇到潼關即便休。」

Heavy Firewood

Xuefong finished carrying some firewood, and threw a bundle in front of the master. Master Dongshan said, “how heavy is it?”

“Nobody on earth can carry it.”

“Then how did it get here?”

Xuefong had no answer. (He would become an important master who is the ancestor of two of the five Houses of Zen, see lecture 6.)

雪峰搬柴次，乃於師面前拋下一束。師曰：「重多少？」峰曰：「盡大地人提不起。」師曰：「爭得到這裡？」峰無語。

Banquet of Foolishness

The master was ill. A monk asked, “The master is ill. Is there one who is not ill?”

“Yes.”

“Can he see the master?”

“I can see him.”

“How do you see him?”

“When I see him, I do not see any illness.”

The master then asked, “Apart from this leaking skin bag, where can you go to see me?”

The monk had no answer. The master said a verse,

Cultivators as numerous as the sands of the Ganges and not one is awakened.

Their mistake is trying to find the Way from other’s tongues.

If you wish to forget form and not leave any traces,

Be diligent and strive to walk in emptiness.

He then had his attendants to help him shave his hair, bathe, and put on the robes. He then sat and had the bell sounded to bid farewell to the monks and appeared to have passed away. The disciples wailed for a long time without stopping. The master suddenly opened his eyes and told the assembly, “The mind of the monastics should not get attached to anything. That is authentic practice. What is the use in laboring for life and resisting death, feeling sad and mourning?” He asked the monks in charge to prepare a final “banquet of foolishness.” The disciples still are reluctant to let the master be gone, and it took seven days to complete the preparation of the banquet. The master then finished the meal with the assembly, and said, “The monastics should have nothing on their mind. Be sure not to be noisy or make a stir when I’m going.” He then returned to the abbot’s quarter, sat upright and was gone.

4 Master Caoshan Benji (840-901): 曹山本寂

Master Caoshan was from Quanzhou (in Fujian Province) and studied Confucianism as a youth. He became a monk at 19 and was a foremost disciple of Master Dongshan. Keenly intelligent and uncompromising as his master, he quickly gained a reputation. He visited the stupa of the Sixth Patriarch, and later settled in Jishui (Jiangxi Province), and named the mountain Cao after Patriarch Huineng, henceforth known as Master Caoshan. He expounded the teachings of Dongshan such as the Five Ranks widely, which gave the distinct Dharma flavor that came to be known as the House of Caodong. When he was 62 he asked one day, “What day is this?” “June

15,” was the reply. “I’m going to do some traveling practice (行腳) starting tomorrow.” The next day, Master Caodong lit an incense, sat properly and passed away. Two scrolls of the Records of Caoshan are available in the Chinese Canon.

Where There Is No Change

Caoshan’s Dharma name was Benji. He sought after Master Dongshan. Dongshan asked him, “Venerable, what is your name?”

“Benji (“Originally Still”).”

“What about *that*?”

“*That* is not named ‘originally still.’”

Dongshan regarded him highly and he became an advanced disciple. He practiced with the master for several years before taking leave. The master privately transmitted the essential principle of Dongshan, and then asked, “Where are you going?”

Caoshan answered, “I’m going where there is no change.”

“How can one ‘go’ where there is no change?”

“Even with going there is no change.”

師諱本寂，尋謁洞山，洞山問：「聞黎名甚麼？」師云：「本寂。」洞山云：「那個呢？」師云：「不名本寂。」洞山深器之。自此入室，盤桓數載，乃辭去，洞山遂密授洞山宗旨，復問云：「子向甚麼處去？」師云：「不變異處去。」洞山云：「不變異處豈有去耶？」師云：「去亦不變異。」

Not A Drop

Disciple: How does a cultivator keep-thus (*bao-ren*) 24 hours a day?

Master Caoshan: Like passing through a country of venomous diseases, you can’t even touch one drop of water.

問：「學人十二時中，如何保任？」師曰：「如經蠱毒之鄉，水也不得沾著一滴。」

Complete the House

The master asked Jinfeng Zhi, “What have you been doing?”

“Building a house.”

“Is it done?”

“This side is done.”

“What about *that* side?”

“When I’m done I’ll inform the master.”

“So it is, so it is.”

師問金峰志曰：「作甚麼來？」金峰云：「蓋屋來。」師曰：「了也未？」金峰云：「這邊則了。」師曰：「那邊事作麼生？」金峰云：「候下工日白和尚。」師曰：「如是，如是。」

Compassion for Thieves

Q: Isn’t a shramana (Buddhist monk) one with great compassion?

Master: Yes.

Q: What happens when he meets the six thieves (i.e. form, sound, smell, taste, touch,

thought)?

M: He must also have compassion.

Q: How?

M: Eliminate them with one swing of the sword.

Q: What happens after you eliminate them?

M: Then you'll become one (with the Way).

問：「沙門豈不是具大慈悲底人？」師曰：「是。」曰：「忽遇六賊來時如何？」師曰：「亦須具大慈悲。」曰：「如何具大慈悲？」師曰：「一劍揮盡。」曰：「盡後如何？」師曰：「始得和同。」

That Which Changes and Does Not Change

To understand this matter, even if you were to become a Buddha or a patriarch today, it is only *this*. If you were to fall into hell or other wretched destinies in samsara, it is only *this*. Though it is useless, you can't be separated from it. You must be its master. If you can be in command, that is non-impermanence. If you cannot be in command, that is impermanence. Remember what Master Yongjia says (in his Song of Enlightenment), “being crude and rash brings disasters.”

Q: What does ‘being crude and rash brings disasters?’

A: It's always just *this*.

Q: How can one avoid them?

A: To know this is enough, what is there to avoid? To avoid it is to fall into impermanence.

To attain non-impermanence, one need to be free with anything that one sees.

欲知此事，饒今成佛成祖去，也只這是。便墮三塗地獄六道去，也只這是。雖然沒用處，要且離他不得。須與他作主宰始得。若作得主宰，即是不變易。若作主宰不得，便是變易也。不見永嘉云：莽莽蕩蕩招殃禍。問：如何是莽莽蕩蕩招殃禍。曰：只這個總是。問曰：如何免得。曰：知有即得，用免作麼。免即同變易去也。若不變易，直須觸目自由始得。

References and Further Readings

- (1) Original Chinese Sources: 景德傳燈錄，五燈會元，指月錄
- (2) “Zen’s Chinese Heritage: The Masters and Their Teachings” by Andy Ferguson, 2000, Wisdom Publications. *(A good reference book of translated Chinese Zen records. However, if you compare with our notes you will find several mistakes due to misunderstanding of the Chinese language.)*
- (3) “The Record of Tung-Shan” translated by William F. Powell, U. of Hawaii Press, 1986. *(This seems to be the only translation of the Records of Master Dongshn. There does not yet seem to be a translation of the Records of Master Caoshan.)*