CHAPTER 25: The Twenty-fifth Patriarch, Venerable Bashashita

(Case)

The Twenty-fifth Patriarch, Venerable Bashashita: The Twenty-fourth Patriarch (Venerable Shishi) instructed him and said, “I now transmit to you the treasury of the true Dharma-Eye of the Tathagata. You must keep it well and benefit the entire future world (with it).” The master realized the causation through past lives and was intimately transmitted the mind-seal.

(Background)

The master was from the land of Keihin [Kubha] and his family name was Baramon [Brahmin]. His father was Jakkô [Silent Conduct]; his mother Jô-anraku [Always Peace and Joy]. In the beginning, his mother dreamed of getting a divine sword, and that is how she became pregnant.

The Venerable Shishi, while traveling about, arrived in the land of Keihin. There was a man named Harika, and from the very first he practiced Zen contemplation. In fact, five groups of people were there: those who practiced Zen samadhi, those who practiced intellectual views, those who grasped forms, those who abandoned forms, and those who avoided (improper) speech. The Venerable (Shishi) embraced the five groups together and his fame spread far and near. Seeking a Dharma successor, he met an elder, who, while pulling the hand of his
son, asked, “My son's name is Shita. When he was born he clenched his left hand. Now he has grown, and yet he still cannot unclench it. I beseech the Venerable, please show me the cause of this (phenomenon) from former lives.” The Venerable (Shishi) looked at (the boy), touched him with his hand, and said, “Return the jewel to me.” The young boy immediately opened his hand and presented a jewel (to the Venerable). Everyone was surprised. The Venerable (Shishi) said, “In the former life I became a monk. There was a young boy named Basha. Once I went to a feast (for monks) in the region of the Western Ocean and received a jewel as a gift. I handed it to Basha. Now he is returning the jewel to me, and the reason for that is really clear.” The elder finally let his son renounce the world (and become a monk), and the Venerable (Shishi) gave him the complete precepts. As a result of the earlier story the Venerable (Shishi) named him Basha-shita. Finally, he passed on the succession, saying, “I now grant you the treasury of the true Dharma-Eye of the Tathagata. You must guard it well and let it prevail in the entire future world.”

(Teisho)

“Realizing the causation through past lives” means that in the former life he was already the young boy Basha. The Venerable (Shishi) entrusted the jewel to him. Then, he entered his mother's womb in the present life and was born into the elder's family, still holding and guarding the jewel, till he finally turned it over to the Venerable (Shishi). Through these (events) you should learn: The story does not
show that the physical body is destroyed and that there exists only a true (indestructible) body. If this body turns out to be a destructible body, how could he have held on to and guarded the jewel till now? You should also know that forsaking life and receiving life do not occur in this destructible body. Here, you should not say: “(Even if) all elements composing the body are crushed and dispersed, one thing (remains as) ever-lasting mystery.” What could the “lasting mystery” be? Simply: forsaking the body appears (as such); receiving the body appears (as such). Therefore, it must be said that the former and the latter are not two. Past and present are not different. Therefore, you should not speak of body, nor should you speak of mind [kokoro]. If it cannot be divided into body and mind, then you cannot divide it into past and present. Therefore, it is thus.

This (fact) concerns not simply Basha; to tell the truth, everyone is like this. Therefore, there is no place to be born and no place to die. It is just changing heads and alternating faces in accordance with time. It certainly is not (a matter of) changing the Four Elements or renewing the Five Aggregates. It is not that a lump of flesh comes to cover it or tiny bone-tips come to support it. Even if there are a thousand kinds of forms and myriads of types, they are all the intrinsic Light of Mind [shinkô]. Not knowing this principle, people think that this person is an infant and that person is old; however, there are no old bodies and intrinsically there is no infancy. If this is the case, then on what principle can you differentiate life and death, and separate before and after? Based on this (fact), to point out that Basha in the former life and
Shita at the present one are not two bodies – this is what “the causation through past lives” means. Therefore, (the Venerable) endowed “the treasury of the true Dharma-Eye of the Tathagata,” and (Bashashita ought to) “benefit the entire future world” (with it).

If so, you should know that all Buddhas and Patriarchs were intrinsically never enlightened; all ignorant people are ultimately undeluded. Sometimes they practice, sometimes they arouse the aspiration (to be on the Way). The aspiration to the Bodhi knows originally no beginning and no ending. Living beings and all Buddhas are originally not inferior or superior. Simply: it is vertically and horizontally thus. So, you should just hold on to and maintain it as it was kalpas ago, not forgetting the causation through past lives. This morning, as usual, I have some humble words to expound on the story.

(Verse)

At the very time when the flowers bloom or the leaves fall,
The wonderful medicine tree\(^1\) has no special taste after all.

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\(^1\) According to the Sutra of the Great Prajna, the root, stem, branches, leaves, blossoms as well as fruit of the medicine tree have a healing function, but the tree itself has no specific taste.