

The World-Honored One had Intimate Language, Kashyapa did not Conceal It

Eight Generations of the Soto Zen Lineage Awakening to and Using this Saying

Collected by Kokyo Henkel

世尊有密語、迦葉不覆藏

This saying, based on the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, forms a thread that runs through the Soto lineage of China and Japan, particularly ancestors 47-51 for whom two of them (Xuedou and Rujing) had profound awakenings when hearing this saying. Teachers expressing truth through intimate language is an essential aspect of the style of the school, and when the meaning is understood and not concealed by a disciple, that is an essential aspect of transmission. This principle is also expressed in the earlier poems of the lineage – Shitou (Sekito Kisen) says, “Hearing the words, understand the meaning; don’t set up standards of your own” and Dongshan (Tozan Ryokai) says, “The meaning is not in the words, yet it responds to the inquiring impulse.” Here are eight generations of the Soto lineage celebrating this intimate saying:

1. Shakyamuni Buddha in Mahaparinirvana Sutra (as quoted by Keizan in Denkoroku on 49th ancestor): The episode comes from the Nirvana Sutra (Chapter 4, “Nature of the Tathāgata,” Part 2). It says: At that time, Kashyapa Bodhisattva said to Buddha: “World-Honored One, as is taught by the Buddha, ‘The Buddha, the World-Honored One, has intimate language.’* But this is not correct. And why is that? Because the buddhas, world-honored ones, only have intimate (secret) language (sayings); they do not have an intimate (secret) treasury. Take, for example, a magician’s wooden puppet: although people see it bend and stretch, bow down and look up, they do not know that there is something inside that makes it move. Buddha-Dharma is not like this. It enables all living beings to completely attain knowing and insight. Why should we say that buddhas, world-honored ones, have a secret treasury?” Buddha praised Kashyapa: “Excellent, excellent, good disciple. As you say, the Tathagata really has no secret treasury. And why is that? Imagine a full autumn moon fully exposed in the sky, clear and unobscured, such that everyone sees it. The language of the Tathagata is also like this, open and manifest, pure and unclouded. Foolish people do not understand and call it a ‘secret treasury.’ The wise fully comprehend and thus do not use the name ‘treasury.’”

* footnote by Foulk and Bodiford: “has intimate language” (*himitsugo ari* 秘密語あり). There is an obvious mistake in the Japanese text here. The corresponding phrase in the Chinese original says, “has a secret treasury” (C. *you mimi zang* 有秘密藏; J. *himitsu zō ari* 秘密藏あり), and that is consistent with the argument that follows in the Nirvana Sutra. The Japanese text, as it stands, contradicts itself by first saying it is “not correct” that buddhas have secret words, and then saying that buddhas “only have secret words,” but no secret treasury.

Kokyo footnote: Kashyapa Bodhisattva in the Nirvana Sutra is a layman, not to be confused with Mahakashyapa the first Indian Zen ancestor – though later Zen ancestors, including Keizan in the Himitsu Shobogenzo, sometimes interpret Kashyapa not concealing it to be referring to Kashyapa’s smiling when the Buddha held up a flower on Vulture Peak. Also, note that elsewhere in the Nirvana Sutra, Buddha-Nature is called the “secret/intimate treasury” (*mitsu zō* 密藏).

2. Yunju Daoying (Ungo Doyo, 39th ancestor, disciple of Dongshan, in Shinji SBGZ case 34): Zen Teacher Daoying of Mount Yunju was asked by a government official, “It is said that the World-Honored One had intimate language and Kashyapa did not conceal it. What is the World-Honored One’s intimate language?” Yunju said, “Officer.” The officer said, “Yes?” Yunju said, “Do you understand?” The officer said, “No.” Yunju said, “If you don’t understand, that is the World-Honored One’s intimate language. If you do understand, that is Kashyapa’s not concealing it.”

3. Qingliao (Choro Seiryō, 47th ancestor, quoted by Keizan in *Himitsu Shobogenzo*):

Qingliao said, “The World-Honored One had intimate language – spring lingers on the ancient river bank; Kashyapa did not conceal it – falling flowers float on the stream.”

4. Zongjue (Tendo Sogaku, 48th ancestor, quoted by Keizan in *Denkoroku* on 49th ancestor):

When Zongjue was abbot of Tiantong Monastery, one day in the Dharma hall he raised up “the World-Honored One had intimate language and Kashyapa did not conceal it.” Hearing this, Zhijian (Xuedou) suddenly awakened to its profound meaning. He stood in the assembly and shed tears. Without thinking, he blurted out, “Why didn’t I hear this before?” After the Dharma hall gathering had ended, Zongjue called Zhijian to see him and asked, “Why did you shed tears in the Dharma hall?” Zhijian said, “The World-Honored One had intimate language and Kashyapa did not conceal it.” Zongjue approved him and said, “Is this not what Yunju predicted (in number 2, quoted above)?”

5. Xuedou (Setcho Chikan, 49th ancestor, quoted by Keizan in *Himitsu Shobogenzo*):

Xuedou said, “The World-Honored One had intimate language and Kashyapa did not conceal it – a night of flowers falling in the rain, water is fragrant throughout the city.”

6. Tiantong Rujing (Tendo Nyojo, 50th ancestor, *Rujing’s Record* compiled by Dogen):

Teacher Rujing came from Mount Furong to Chan Teacher Zhijian’s place on Mount Xuedou in Mingzhou. Jian asked, “Where are you from?” Rujing said, “From Furong.” Jian asked, “For what reason did you come here?” Rujing said, “I hear you have a language (saying) that traveled three-thousand miles in one night. Is this true?” Jian said “Yes.” Rujing said, “What is the World-Honored One’s intimate language?” Jian then hit him. Rujing said, “What does it mean that Kashyapa did not conceal it?” Jian hit him again. Rujing was about to say something and Jian hit him again. At this, Rujing realized great awakening. He burned incense and bowed. Jian said, “What is the meaning of your burning incense?” Rujing said, “I’m offering you three bows,” and he sweat all over his body. Jian then stopped and Rujing shouted “Ahhhhh!” and left. After that, he attended Jian for fifteen years. *

Later, when Rujing was a teacher, he ascended the hall and said (in his *Tiantong Record*), “The World-Honored One had intimate language – cold pond, night moon round. Kashyapa did not conceal it – withered trees, dense clouds elegant. It seems that people attain life in the midst of death, and death in the midst of life, in order to know this message.” (He opened both his hands and said:) “The fragrance of the flower forest sweetens the spring air; one speck of spiritual light brightens the world.”

* Note that Rujing’s awakening story here is different from his story in Keizan’s *Denkoroku* (which has no equivalent in the Chinese canon), in which Rujing awakens by contemplating Zhijian’s question, “Mr. Purity (Jing), how can you purify what has never been defiled?” ‘Five Lamps Merged at the Source’ has Rujing’s awakening being catalyzed by Zhaozhou’s “Why did Bodhidharma come from the West? The cypress tree in the garden.” Rujing’s awakening story here in the *Record of Rujing* is based on the story of the World-Honored One’s intimate language. Rujing must have known of known of Zhijian’s (Xuedou’s) awakening story, that “traveled three-thousand miles in one night,” and inquired about it upon first meeting his teacher. This dialog was then the catalyst for Rujing’s own awakening, and has now traveled all the way to us today.

7. Eihei Dogen (51st ancestor, *Shobogenzo Mitsugo*, ‘Intimate Language’):

Zen Teacher Daoying of Mount Yunju was asked by a government official, “It is said that the World-Honored One had intimate language and Kashyapa did not conceal it. What is the World-Honored One’s intimate language?” Yunju said, “Officer.” The officer said, “Yes?” Yunju said, “Do you understand?” The officer said, “No.” Yunju said, “If you don’t understand, that is the World-Honored One’s intimate language. If you do understand, that is Kashyapa’s not concealing it.”

The intimate language spoken of here was not only put forth by Shakyamuni Buddha, the World-Honored One, but also by all buddhas and ancestors. When there is the World-Honored One, there is intimate language. When there is intimate language, Kashyapa does not conceal it. Since there are hundreds and thousands of World-Honored Ones, there are hundreds and thousands of Kashyapas. Study this point without fail, as if cutting through what seems impossible to cut through. Thoroughly investigate this in detail little by little, hundreds and thousands of times, and don't to understand it all at once. Do not assume that you understand it right away. Yunju was already a world-honored one, so he had intimate language and Kashyapa did not conceal it. But do not regard the minister's response to Yunju as intimate language.

Yunju said to the minister, *If you don't understand, that is the World-honored One's intimate language. If you do understand, Kashyapa did not conceal it.* Aspire to investigate these words for many eons. Yunju's words, *If you don't understand*, are a world-honored one's intimate language. Not understanding is not the same as going blank. Not understanding does not mean that you don't know.

By saying, *If you don't understand*, Yunju is encouraging practice without language. Investigate this. Then, Yunju said *If you do understand...* He did not mean that the minister should rest on his understanding...

Old Teacher Xuedou said to his assembly:

The World-Honored One had intimate language and Kashyapa did not conceal it.

A night of flowers falling in the rain, water is fragrant throughout the city.

A night of flowers falling in the rain, water is fragrant throughout the city spoken here by Xuedou is intimate. Study this and examine the eyeballs and nostrils of buddhas and ancestors. This is not somewhere Linji or Deshan can arrive. Open the nostrils within the eyeballs, and sharpen the nose tip within the ears. With the entire body and mind, study the realm where the ear, nose, and eye are neither old nor new. This is how flowers falling in the rain open up the world.

Water is fragrant throughout the city spoken by Xuedou conceals the body and reveals light. This being so, in the daily practice of the buddhas and ancestors' school, the passage *The World-Honored One had intimate language and Kashyapa did not conceal it* is studied and penetrated. Each of the seven ancient buddhas has studied intimate language like this. Thus, Kashyapa and Shakyamuni Buddha have completely manifested intimate language.

8. Keizan Jokin (54th ancestor, Denkoroku on Xuedou, 49th ancestor, translated by Francis Cook): (Commenting on Xuedou's awakening story – see section 4 above): This expression has been used for a long time by followers of the ancestral teachers. Therefore, when it was brought up here, Zhijian (Xuedou) was awakened. It was truly not concealed. When you hear words, you must know their inner meaning and not get trapped by the words. Saying “fire” is not fire, and saying “water” is not water. Therefore, you do not burn your mouth when you say “fire,” nor is your mouth wet when you say “water.” You must realize that fire and water are not words. Priest Shitou said, “When you hear words, you should understand their meaning and not set up any rules of your own.” Also, Yaoshan said, “You have to look yourself. You cannot eliminate language. I am saying these words right now and they reveal what is unspoken. Who is That One who lacks ears, eyes, and so on, right from the beginning?”... Monks, you should know that there is Someone who is not only speechless but also mouthless. Not only is He mouthless but He also has no eyes. From the beginning, He has not possessed a hair's worth of the four elements and six senses. Though it is like this, it is not emptiness, nor is it nothingness. Even though you say you see things and hear sounds, it is not your eyes seeing or your ear hearing; it is this Faceless Fellow doing it. Your mind and body were provided by this Fellow. Therefore, the mind and body are not at all created things. If you haven't reached this point, then you may think that your body was created as a result of your parents, and that your body is a result of karma. Thus, you may think that your body resulted from the union of sperm and egg, or that your body is covered with skin and flesh. This is because you have not thoroughly clarified Self.

In order to get you to know this realm, spiritual teachers use unlimited means to get you to put an end to the six senses and stop everything. At such a time, there is something that cannot be destroyed, something that cannot be crushed. When you become aware of it, it surely cannot be reduced to emptiness or existence, nor is it bright or dark. Therefore, it is hard to talk about whether you are deluded or enlightened. For this reason, this realm is not called “Buddha,” “Dharma,” “Mind,” or “essential nature.” It is nothing but bright light existing brilliantly. Therefore, it is not the light of fire or the light of water; it is just boundless clarity and brightness. You cannot see it, though you try; nor can you acquire it, though you try. It is just alertness. When the three disasters of water, fire, and wind occur, and the world is destroyed, it is not destroyed. When the triple world and its six paths arise [again] and the myriad things sprout profusely, this thing does not change. Even Buddhas do not know what to make of it; even ancestors do not know what to make of it. O monks, if you want to reach this realm in person, you must close your eyes for a while, regulate your breathing, forget your body, have no place to lodge your body, have no need for any relationship with things, become like a cloudless blue sky, and become like the great ocean without waves. Then you will have some experience of It.

At this time, even though Buddha ancestors cannot figure you out, there is a bright light. It is not like the moon in the dark sky, or like the sun. The whole sky becomes the moon, and there is nothing else [remaining] to be illuminated. The whole universe becomes sun, and there is nowhere to shine. You must experience this completely. If you do not experience this realm, not only will you be deluded about monk and layperson, male and female, but you will transmigrate through the triple world and six paths of rebirth. While as disciples of the Buddha you look like monks, you will still end up in the hands of old Yama [judge of the Dead]. Won’t you be mortified!

There is no place in all the many worlds where the Buddha-Dharma of Shakyamuni does not exist fully. How can you fail to reach it if you seek it? It is not easy to acquire a human body. You received it as a result of [good] roots in the past. If you once reach this realm, you will be completely liberated. It is not male or female, divinity or devil, worldling or sage, monk or lay. If you can reach this realm, though you are a monk, you are not a monk; though you are a layperson, you are not a layperson. You will not be deluded by your six senses, nor will you be at the mercy of the six kinds of consciousness. If you fail to reach it, you will be completely deluded and enslaved by those things. Wouldn’t that be too bad? It exists with you from the beginning but, if you still want to reach it, you must use your power. Though no one is without it, people are deluded by their eyes [and other senses]. How much more pitiful it is that they transmigrate ever so long.

Just look carefully, forgetting the senses and their objects. Have no recourse to mind or consciousness, and you will surely reach it. You do not have to reach it gradually [by stages]. Once you arouse your determination with all your power, you will experience it. Even though it is brief, just immediately become aware of the source, without giving rise to partial understanding, and you will reach it. Once you reach it, just as if you were standing on four feet, you will not be moved by the eight winds (gain and loss, praise and blame, fame and disgrace, pleasure and pain). The ancients said, “Learning the Way is like making fire by rubbing two sticks together. Do not stop a second when you see smoke.” Once you exert all your power, you will get fire. What is “smoke”? When you encounter the skill of a spiritual teacher and not a single thought arises, this is when you see smoke. If you stop here and rest, it is like stopping at warmth; but if you continue on, you will see fire. This means knowing the One who does not give rise to a single thought.

If you are not thoroughly aware of the Self, then even though it seems that you have found some rest now and in so doing you are like a withered tree, you are nothing but a corpse whose spirit has not dispersed [but has no power]. Therefore, if you want to personally experience this realm, you must practice with everything you have. It does not depend on meditation or croaking like a bullfrog. What is the principle of this “secret words (intimate language) unconcealed”?

*It is called the indestructible hidden body;
That body is empty and bright.*