

Transmitting the Light

translator: Cook, 2003

INTRODUCTION

1. The Text

The *Record of Transmitting the Light* (*Denkoroku* in Japanese) is a type of literature that can be called "spiritual genealogy." Like ordinary genealogies, it traces the history of a family, locating its origins in some ancestor long ago and tracing that ancestor's descendants down through the successive generations to the present. This accomplishes several goals that are important for the family: It provides a panoramic view of the continuity of a line rooted in distant antiquity; it records the exploits and special distinctions of each generation; it provides a basis for family pride and style; and, perhaps most important, it provides a strong sense of family identity. Together, these things create a sense of rootedness, as well as continuity and identity through history.

But unlike traditional family genealogies tracing a genetic bloodline, the *Record* traces a spiritual bloodline. Thus, the fifty-three generations recorded in Keizan's work are not related by blood but rather by spiritual kinship in which the inheritance of each generation is one of spiritual endowment and authority.

Keizan took it as his task to trace the genealogy of the Soto line of Zen Buddhism, which was his "family." The founding ancestor to which Keizan's line is heir was the Buddha Shakyamuni, who passed on his spiritual endowment and authority to his own spiritual son, Mahakashyapa, who, in turn, passed it on to his own spiritual son, Ananda, and so on, through twenty-eight generations in India, twenty-two generations in China, and two generations in Japan, ending with Zen Master Koun Ejo, the fifty-second patriarch of the family. In the process of recording these generations, Keizan discusses the spiritual struggles and victories of such well-known figures in