

Wherever You Stand 1: Who?

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Welcome aboard!

Please stay in your seats until we've come to a complete and full stop.

I'll let you know.

Today we will start looking into the "Shodoka", The Song of Liberation,
which was written a long time ago,
somewhere around 713
by Yoka Daishi.

Now who was Yoka Daishi?

Actually, he died in 713, so he wasn't really writing then, so it had to have been before...
He was 48 years old when he died,
in the same year as his Teacher, Huineng,
who was the sixth Chinese Ancestor.

Yoka Daishi was regarded by many as being a fine Teacher.
He has been considered a student of Huineng's,
even though according to various stories,
Huineng was actually the person who recognized,
gave recognition to the fact that Yoka Daishi had woken up.

Yoka Daishi studied a lot on his own.
He apparently studied all the important teachings that were available to him
and this led him to the understanding that
without zazen,
they were all empty words,
they were nothing.

He built a hermitage, the stories go, spent many years there,
and is said to have perfectly realized zazen
in walking, standing, sitting, or lying down.

He was said to have become enlightened when reading the Vimalakirtinirdesha-sutra.
He heard of Huineng and sought him out at Shaolin monastery
and stayed only one night,
according to the stories,
and was referred to as
"Master of Enlightenment Attained in One Night".

Well, of course the enlightenment,

as it were,
was not attained in one night,
but apparently was recognized and certified by Huineng,
and Yoka Daishi stayed only one night.

Now the “Shodoka”,
“Song of Enlightenment”,
“Song of Immediate Satori”,
“Song of Realization of the Way”,
“Ode on Enlightenment”,
has 64 verses
and there are many different ways of translating it.

Yoka Daishi, also known as Yung-chia Hsuan-chueh or Yung Chan Ching Chueh
was one of the most gifted Teachers of Chan in the Tang Dynasty.
As I said, he was a Dharma heir of Huineng,
the sixth Patriarch or Ancestor

we have changed the language,
but you will come
across “Patriarch” in many many texts that you may read,
and Anzan Hoshin roshi has changed,
(and this started twenty-some years ago,)
changed “Patriarch” to “Ancestor”

for obvious reasons.

Now, Yoka Daishi was recognized by Huineng.
Huineng was the sixth Chan Ancestor
and he had been taught by Hongren
who was the fifth Chinese Ancestor.
The fourth was Daoxin,
the third Sengcan,
the second, Huike.
The first Chan Ancestor was Bodhidharma.

I think it’s important to have some context
so I’ll do my best to provide an overview of what was going on
in the world,
in the world of Buddhism
and practice
in the sixth and seventh centuries.

I find it more interesting to be able to place these different characters,
and when they’re placed in time and space,
and we start to see how people were living,

what they were up to,
what was going on,
the characters start to fill out.

There are not many records that are available that can say and agree upon dates and times,
so if we say sixth and seventh century—pretty close.

Dates are given, for example, of when Bodhidharma arrived in China.

Some say that it was in 528, others say 527, others suggest it was before 479 c.e..

One of the things that's very interesting is that,
apparently Zen had been in China,
Chan in China,
before it took root in Japan
and for some 700 years that was the case.

The Chan, or Zen word,
was regarded as cool and hip,
hard to define,
and "imparted and attracted an enigmatic air to anyone believed to understand it".

So, even then,
1500 years ago,
there was this mystique
around the practice,
because as we know,
most people would rather believe something
than actually practise something.

Now Bodhidharma is sort of the granddaddy,
the great-granddaddy
who gave birth,
as it were
to the six Zen Ancestors, the six Chan Ancestors.

Bodhidharma was an Indian, and no one knows exactly where he was born, the rumour is that he was actually from a fairly well-off family, a Brahmin family. For whatever reason, he was familiar with and had come across the Buddhadharma and had decided to take off and see the world. He apparently spent years on the Ocean Silk Road, which was of course the ocean through which travellers would sail, and they would end up in Guangzhou or Canton, which was rapidly becoming a very, very busy port.

Now, words that you will come across,
and have come across in the texts about practice, such as
"the Way"
and
"attaining the Way"
were already used in China to describe Daoist and Confucian ideals,

talking about an exalted path
of philosophical
or
aesthetic insight and practice.

So, as is the case today,
language is picked up and it is used in different ways.
We may think we are talking about and understanding the same thing,
but that may not necessarily be the case,
so it's worthwhile looking into it.

Apparently, one of the reasons why Zen or Chan spread throughout Chinese culture
was because its literature coincided with
the development of wood block printing.
So just as we're doing today,
Zen and texts about Zen were riding a technological wave.

The next bit of technology that happened in China was
the invention of moveable type,
so this is why,
it's one of the reasons why,
we have texts that have survived.

Why was it that Bodhidharma came to be regarded as the First Chan Ancestor?

Well some say because
he was the first to emphasize directly observing
the actual nature of body and mind,
the actual nature of experiencing.
Some scholars say that
that approach was already evident in China,
so part of his attraction may have been
a certain charisma.
We know stories about Bodhidharma,
but there was a flavour around this particular Teacher
that had an impact on the culture
and drew to him,
over time,
and to his Teachings,
other Teachers,

other people who became Teachers, such as the other five Chan Ancestors.

We've all heard,
and I'm sure you will remember the story,
particularly when you do kinhin and walk past Anzan Hoshin's zenga of Bodhidharma,

his interactions with Emperor Wu,
so we won't go there,
but we'll mention: "Vast emptiness. Nothing Holy"
because there are other mentions of it.

There are other stories of Bodhidharma,
one of which was that when he arrived in the port of Guangzhou,
he struck the ground and said: "There is a treasure here".

Some guys heard the words,
and they were from a foreign holy man!
so apparently they went and started digging
and they found water, fresh water
in this brackish tidal area,
and apparently the well continued to be used until 1953,
when pipes were put in to carry water to homes.

Is that true?

I don't know, it's another story and it's interesting that such a story
has survived for say, 1300 years.

A book written in 650, "The Continued Biography of Eminent Monks", by monk Daoshuan,
talks about the second generation of the disciples of Bodhidharma,
and this book, "The Continued Biography of Eminent Monks",
is the one that suggests Bodhidharma arrived before 479,
and it does mention that he taught "samadhi", or "mindfulness" meditation.

Bodhidharma taught two ways: entering through the principle, and entering through practice.
The principle that he spoke of was accepting that all beings possessed the same true nature which is
obstructed or conditioned by worldly attachments.
Second, entering through practice: you put your butt down and face the wall. We would recognize this as we
are doing the same thing right here right now.

The dates are not to be taken as if written in stone,
because apparently
they are not written in stone
anywhere,
but the general consensus is that
there was such a character as Bodhidharma and
as "The Continued Biography of Eminent Monks" states,
there were his students who woke up,
became Teachers,
transmitted to other students
who became Teachers,
and accepted students
and confirmed people's waking up
as was done by Huineng

for Yoka Daishi, who wrote the “Shodoka”.

“Wherever You Stand”,
which is the title of this series,
is a big clue.

Take it literally.
Wherever you stand,
sit,
walk,
lie down,
eat,
dress,
go shopping,
wherever you are
is always now,

and you have at that moment
everything that you need
to practise.

Feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
feel the feet on the floor,
moment after moment after moment.

Practise what was taught
and what has been taught
and talked about
for centuries.

Now, we have historically, and today,
we have Chinese Buddhism,
we have Tibetan Buddhism,
we have Japanese Buddhism,
Korean Buddhism,
there are differences and
I’m hoping that some of you will perhaps become interested in exploring...

“Exploring,”
I mean in olden days you had to get on a ship or a donkey,
or you had to move your own ass along
footstep by footstep.
Now what do you do?
You can do exactly as I did, sit down in front of your computer and Google,
and follow those trails that open out.

You will find many interesting things.

Now one of the differences was
in Chinese monastic practice the monks
did not get married,
did not have families,
did not earn money.
Major difference from Japanese.

This affected Dogen in the 1200s,
causing him to head back to China,
to go back to the source to find out what's going on

and in fact in the 1980s there was a saying
when some Chinese monks went to Japan: "One went, three came back",
meaning that in the course of whatever visit, the person got married, and had a family.

So we're covering as much as we can to provide a context for the writing of the "Shodoka." We're not going to get there today.

I'm going to stop talking right now,
we're at Bodhidharma,
we'll go further,
the next time we'll explore a bit of the sixth and seventh centuries more thoroughly,
then we'll look at the text.

So:
radical practice
right here
right now
wherever you stand,
this is it.

Why waste time?

You're doing something that's been done by a lot of people,
there are remarkable similarities,
factual similarities to what's happening here
and what happened in the 600s and 700s:
technological innovation, making possible the spread of texts,
people travelling to seek out what is true...

and all ending up with their butt on a round cushion.

Isn't that wonderful?

Thank you for listening.