

Wherever You Stand 11: Who: Dajian Huineng Part 4

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Previously on “Wherever You Stand”...

we were looking into the life of Huineng.

Now remember Huineng:
he was born of a poor family,
he was illiterate,
he woke up upon hearing the “Diamond sutra”
and somehow, in spite of being illiterate,
he gave rise to “the mind that dwells nowhere”
which is of course in the Lineage of Bodhidharma.

So, after receiving Transmission from Hongren, Huineng became Abbott of Baolin monastery which was founded by an Indian monk in 502, and the name was changed to Nanhua Temple. So in some texts you’ll see “Baolin”, in some texts you’ll see “Nanhua”.

Now, Huineng had, it is said, up to a thousand monks, nuns, lay women, lay men who were studying with him. He did not, however, some say, formally present the Dharma and the robe to any specific successor and that is why he is referred to as the Sixth and last of the Chan Ancestors.

So, Huineng went to Baolin Temple in Canton with the thousand people. The governor of the province actually received the formless precepts of the mind ground from him and invited him to teach at Ta-fan Temple.

Here is a quote from a translation of the “Platform sutra” which is attributed the talks and teachings of Huineng, but he being illiterate did not write it, so his students did. We can imagine as well that amongst those students there was Yoka daishi who wrote the “Shodoka” which is the reason why, in case you’ve forgotten [laughter] we are actually looking into all of this, to show how the ideas were passed on.

You should know that the Buddha Nature of the ignorant and the enlightened are the same. The only difference: the former are deluded, the latter awakened to it. Today I will expound the Mahaprajnaparamita Dharma so that each of you will acquire wisdom.

It is through teachings such as this that Huineng was understood and came to represent Zen’s most essential insights. “Mahaprajnaparamita” is the Sanskrit word which means “the great wisdom which enables one to reach the other shore”.

Chan, of which Huineng was the Sixth Ancestor, original Ancestor, Chan grew to be the largest sect in Chinese Buddhism. The Teachers branched out and each school that developed with its own special emphasis, all kept the same basic focus on meditational or mindfulness practice, personal instruction, and personal experience. So this is why Huineng has been credited with being such an important influence in Chan and Zen and he was said to have said that the “great wisdom which enables one to reach the other

shore" should be done by the mind, the mindbody and this has nothing to do with verbal repetitions. So some schools, some approaches would be repeating a mantra over and over again to the exclusion of everything else, which of course we know as a form of focussing.

The capacity of the mind is broad and great like space, no boundaries, neither square nor round, neither great nor small, neither blue nor yellow, neither red nor white, neither above nor below, neither long nor short, neither anger nor joy, neither right nor wrong, neither good nor bad, it has neither head nor tail.

So this moment of waking up to the actual nature of experience, this sudden enlightenment which has grown to be called the Southern Chan school of Buddhism, the Sudden Enlightenment School, which advocated an immediate and direct approach to Buddhist practice and enlightenment was from the Bodhidharma/Huineng Lineage.

The "Platform sutra" is credited with being one of the most influential texts in East Asian meditational practice.

So we have the Southern or Sudden Enlightenment school which was credited to Huineng, and the Northern or Gradual Enlightenment which was credited to Shenxiu who you'll remember was the very literate and educated monk who also studied with Hongren.

So Hongren gave birth, as it were, to these two Teachers. Now who knows exactly what the differences or the samenesses were because as we know, over time, stories change. Stories change with the tellers of the stories and these people are not around so that we can ask them. There are writings that are being uncovered and have been uncovered but interestingly enough, the writings, even in the original, differ and of course the translations differ, totally dependent upon the people who do the writing and the translating,

but what we do know:

is

that there is the fact of waking up

to

THIS moment of experience,

wherever you

stand,

sit,

walk,

lie down,

eat,

sing,

play music,

paint,

read,

watch television...

ANY activity that the bodymind engages in
is the activity that this very bodymind

that has its ass sitting on the cushion
is engaged in.

THIS bodymind is the same bodymind
that stands, walks, goes to the washroom, drives its car
IT doesn't change,
the activity changes,
the activity engaged in changes,
so in formal practice,
in which you are engaged in this moment,
you are sitting in a formal practice environment
with many of the usual distractions removed,
which makes it easier for you to actually train,
this is what you are doing
this is called Zen training,
the instruction:

whenever you notice anything—
now this is a word that seems to be very difficult to comprehend:
ANYTHING
that is meaning
ANY and EVERYthing that is noticed
that is perceived by the bodymind
is a moment when you can practise
at the moment of noticing it.

You are the Knowing.
Knowing does not stop when you close the door of the monastery behind you.
Sometimes we act like such idiots that it can seem that it does,
but it doesn't.
We make these artificial distinctions,
there's the Me who sits here in this Hatto,
then there's the Me who is called for daisan,
and the momentary relief of being on the stairs [laughter]
and being off the cushion,
and then there's the distraction of hearing our name called,
which we believe until we don't believe it anymore
until we see it as the action of self-image,
trying to come up with the good story.

"Well, when she says 'How is your practice?' I will say: 'Just like Huineng!'"

[more laughter from the Sensei and students]

We do this actually all the time,
mimicking,

and that's how beings,
not just human beings,
beings learn by mimicking.

The problem that practice presents is this simple word: anything.

When anything at all is noticed,
practise at that moment of noticing
by feeling the breath,
feeling the whole bodymind.

So, when you notice a thought going:

"Yes, I could say: 'I did practise at the moment of noticing'. Wait, no, I better use some other word... Practice is wonderful!"

And the stories go on...

"I hate practice. Practice makes me sick. Practice makes me feel like an idiot because when I sit here in front of you, I can't come up with anything to say."

Well this is something that self-image has experienced since the beginning of practice.

There is a traditional descriptive phrase:

"The tongue develops a bone."

[O-sensei garbles some words, speaking as though the tongue were indeed a large bone, everyone laughs.]

And it's kind of a bullshit detector, once that starts to happen, you know you've been tied up by thoughts about what it is supposed to be doing. This is classic self-image.

Self-image,
a phrase or a couple of words with a little stick in between,
that are used to describe this contraction into a sense of a self
that has a belief about how it is
and how the world is.

So, the name is called,
self-image goes:

"Ooh, I've got to come up with something really good, something I've never said before, something that she's never heard before. No, no, wait, I'll say something classic."

That is self-image at work.

As soon as you notice it, it falls into,
well it actually falls into the ANYTHING category before you notice it,
but definitely when you notice these stories,
you can recognize that these are thoughts.
The instruction is when you notice anything,
feel the breath, feel the whole bodymind, feel the whole moment.

It's that simple but we don't like simple, no we like to make things complicated.

Why?

Because bodymind actually feels comfortable with it in a way
because that's what it's used to.

Don't be fooled!

The basic message of self-image
and its stories is that
you're unsatisfactory.

What you're going to say is unsatisfactory.

The thought that you're having is unsatisfactory.

Whatever you do is unsatisfactory.

And of course that might be a slight exaggeration but
the bottom line is one of unsatisfactoriness
or dissatisfaction with what's actually going on,
and this is a clue:

Self-image says what is going on should not be going on.
This stuff can drive you crazy.

When you recognize those are thoughts,
and actually take a big leap of faith
feel the breath
sit up straight
feel the whole bodymind
(and it takes much longer to talk about it
than it does to...)
[O-sensei claps hands]
DO it.

You notice that whatever thought was present,
whatever little state was forming
drops away in that moment,
and that's a moment of
Sudden Enlightenment,
or
Waking Up to Reality.

You keep doing that
any time you notice anything
and those successions of moments
which you are practising
become more and more
completely
more and more

of the time
how you are
and who you are.

You don't need the stories,
surely by now you've recognized that the stories are bullshit.

[O-sensei laughs]

Or maybe you haven't...

[students laugh]

some of them are really kind of interesting.

"Oh poor me..."

You know, it covers the gamut
(credit to Dorothy Parker)
"the gamut from A to B".
[laughter]

So the stories of self-image
on the whole
are very similar and
very boring,
but they are thoughts.

Notice a thought,
feel the whole bodymind
in
this
moment.

So back to Huineng.

There he was, in Nanhua Temple, or Baolin, where apparently he died after teaching for quite some time. He was around 73, he died in 713 C.E., and his mummified body was kept at Nanhua or Baolin Temple. These mummified remains apparently were seen by a Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, who visited the temple in 1589, the remains were in the Ancestors Hall. Apparently they were kept a Nanhua Temple until, according to some stories, they were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

Another story:

some say the remains were saved from the destruction of the Cultural Revolution by an Abbot Fuyuan of Yunmen Temple.

Huineng was said to have died while sitting in zazen and the mummy was sitting in zazen. There are, for those of you who are interested, there are numbers of descriptions and images of mummified monks that if you're into this kind of thing you can access on the Web. It's kind of interesting.

In Japan there was a practice of self-mummification.

"Hmm, what's that?" you might say.

Well, three years of eating only nuts and seeds, another three years bark and roots, another of drinking poisonous tea until finally what was left was put in the ground with a little bell and the bell had to be rung every day until it wasn't rung anymore and someone would come and check it out and there would be this mummy.

Mummification was practised in China as well and some say still is. So often monks would leave instructions, especially abbots, especially people who were perceived to have some sort of influence or power by those who came after, because they're the ones who have to do the mummifying if it wasn't self-mummified. Often instructions would be left that they be buried in lotus posture, put in a vessel with drying agents, coal, wood, paper, lyme, surrounded by bricks and exhumed after three years, then decorated with paint and adorned with gold.

Numbers of monks, including Daoxin the Fourth Ancestor were apparently treated in this way. And I say "apparently", there were just little whiffs and hints.

Huineng, Yunmen, again, supposedly mummified.

Scholars suggest that these important monks were intentionally mummified for a number of reasons: maintenance of a sense of continuity with the past for monastic communities, enhancement of a monastery's indications of the presence of divinity, spirituality, to be awe inspiring, to increase claims of authority and qualifications of a pilgrimage site—tourism, money! Face it!

So there are bits and pieces just scattered around of mummified monks. Does Huineng's mummy still exist? Who knows? There are so many sites in China that claim to have been, for example, where Bodhidharma was (much like the George Washington thing, "George Washington slept here"). It's good for business to have these signs and so on around saying so-and-so was here. These people were definitely real people, they definitely lived, they definitely studied, they definitely transmitted what it is that you're practising right now, but where, when, how, can be a little shifty. Why? Because people make up stories, and we've all had stories made up about us and we've all made up stories, perhaps not intentionally, but we've done it.

So we leave Huineng. He was a nice mummy, it's worth having a look at.

A couple of verses from the "Shodoka: the Song of Freedom"

*Mistaking the finger for the moon
their practice is confused
and they fabricate complexity with senses and objects.*

*When not one thing is seen, this
is the Realm of Reality as a Continual Presencing
and one is truly the Sovereign Seer.*

*Understand the truth, and all conditional hindrances
are nowhere to be found;*

*not knowing true emptiness you worry
about debits and credits.*

*This is like a starving man turning down a
feast for a king,
or someone ill refusing the physician's prescription.*

*Practise Zen in this world of desires
like a lotus blossoming in the midst of flames.*

So, next time we will look into Yoka daishi, Yung-chia Hsuan-chueh, who born 665, and apparently died in 713, just after writing the "Shodoka". He, as well as Dogen, started young. Yoka daishi was eight when he became a monk in the Tien-tai school, as was Dogen some years later.

So these are our Ancestors.

Each time we sit,
stand,
walk,
lie down,
notice a moment of Waking Up to Reality
and feel the breath and
feel the whole bodymind,
we are doing what they did.

Key word:
DOING
okay?

Have fun with that!

Thank you for listening.