Wherever You Stand 2: Who: Bodhidharma, Part 1

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Dainen-ji, November 17th, 2012

Thank you for traveling to the sitting this morning.

Oh, some of you may have come, what, ten miles?
Twenty miles?
Down the stairs?

Anyway, you traveled to get here
and before that
you traveled
to actually come to a workshop
to actually look into
what Zen practice might be.

Today, we're in the second Dharma Talk of "Wherever You Stand", looking into the Shodoka.

We are looking at who again?
Who?
The first Chinese Ancestor
the first Chan Ancestor,
the first Zen Ancestor:
Bodhidharma.

"What? Again? How much can we say about this old fellow?"

Well quite a lot because with modern technology, more and more information is actually being made available.

Why is it worth looking into?

Well without this fellow and his rather rough life,
there's a good possibility
that none of us would be sitting here today
doing this practice,

this bare boned practice of
facing the wall,

looking into moment to moment experiencing,
recognizing that none of the patterns that come up,
none of the thoughts and feelings that come up
are YOU.

You're the Knowing of them.

When you notice anything,
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind.

So as I say, we're looking into this fellow, Bodhidharma,
and
Anzan roshi has referred to him as
"Bodhidharma, that sleazy old fart who washes dirt with mud."

Apparently he was quite a character—
and that of course is said with love and respect,
the reference to him,
that's why we have him up on the wall,
the zenga
in the Hatto and
downstairs in the Zendo.

It looks as if as things are uncovered, that this person really did exist.
Of course there are many stories which are apocryphal or false because why?
Because people make up stories, that's why.
There's no problem with that, but we do like to know what is true and what is fabrication.

What's true is what is taught,
and what Bodhidharma taught was that all objects,
names,
forms of experience,
are manifestations of mind,
or we could say,
are all knowns.
Does that sound familiar?

Well this caused him a lot of trouble when he was in China,
trouble to the point
where some say he may have been poisoned
by teachers from other schools
who did not agree with what he was teaching,
and one quote which comes from a recent book,
we don't know where he got his source, actually,
but a quote which is in a book "All is Change", written by a fellow named Lawrence Sutin,
attributed to Bodhidharma which is:

"I don't talk about precepts, devotions, or ascetic practices, such as immersing yourself in fire or water, treading on a wheel of knives, eating one meal a day or never lying down, these are fanatical, provisional teachings. Once you recognize your moving, miraculously aware nature, yours is the mind of all Buddhas."
—all those who have woken up.

This of course was very much in opposition to what many people, many masters were interested in, such as the Tripitaka, the Three Baskets, the Sutra-pitaka. (The Teachings and sermons of Buddha are originally written in Sanskrit or Pali.)

It's important to remember:
nothing, the Buddha wrote nothing down.
Gautama Siddhartha, apparently, wrote nothing down
that survived
and writing seemed to have started some
maybe 200 years after he died,
so a lot of it may have been what
other people were told that
this figure
may have said.

The others were the Vinaya-pitaka, the Second Basket, the rules and regulations of monastic life ranging from dress code and dietary rules to prohibitions in personal conduct.

Then the Abhidharma, we've all heard that word: philosophical and psychological discourse and interpretation of Buddhist doctrine.

So the people involved in the Vinaya-pitaka, apparently developed quite a jealousy if not hatred for Bodhidharma when he was teaching in China.

Where did this fellow come from?
Well, rumour has it that he was born October 5th in South India, son of an Indian king, and the Indian king was a Pallava king, Simhavarman and he was in the capital Kancheepuram.

This king had three sons. The youngest one was named Bodhitara, the king himself was a Buddhist and thus it would explain the name Bodhitara. The two elder sons, apparently, were fearful that the youngest son would in fact inherit, so they gave him grief.

Now often in families, you need no reason for giving a younger sibling grief, it just seems to be something that does happen…

But they gave him grief throughout his life. The son of one of the sons who became a king after his father died, was of great help to Bodhidharma later in his journey, literally his journey.

So Bodhidharma, Bodhitara at the time, made a choice: he wanted to become a monk. His leanings were along that line. He wanted to know what was going on. There was a wandering Teacher named Prajnatara who showed up in the capital city.

Bodhitara's father contacted him or her to come and teach his youngest son. This happened. Bodhitara took monastic vows and was named Bodhidharma.

So yes, it would seem that there may be a chance that Prajanatara was in fact a female and Zen histories transmitted to Korea in the 7th century portray this Dharma Ancestor as a woman. It's not surprising that reference to gender may have been lost in China because in classical Chinese, gender is often inferred from

context and not stated explicitly. So it wouldn't be surprising if that information were lost.

One day Bodhidharma said to her, when India was experiencing a lot of invasions from Huns who were sweeping in through northern India in the 5th century and down, that was one of the reasons why the person who became Prajnatara actually arrived in southern India, trying to escape the chaos and killing that was going on as a result of various invasions in the north. So Bodhidharma said to her:

"What should I do when you die? Where should I go?"

And she said: "The Dharma is dead in India."

That sounds familiar because a similar thing was said by Daiji Tenku, our great-grandfather in Dharma, to Joshu roshi, our grandfather in Dharma.

"The Dharma is dead here: get out of town."

So that apparently was the cause for Bodhidharma leaving after Prajnatara died at 67, leaving to go to China.

Now there are rumours that in the process of getting to China that Bodhidharma stopped in Indonesia and Malaysia and spread the Buddhadharma there, but I don't know for sure, no one seems to know for sure, but what we do know, and apparently it is quite sure, this person did arrive in China, most likely around 470 C.E.

He was aided by his brother's son who was now a king of India. This king was very fond of his uncle, the monk Bodhidharma, and wanted to make amends for the bad treatment that "BD" had received at the hands of his brothers, one of which was the father of the man who was now king. So he sent a message to the pigeon men, the guys in charge of carrier pigeons, and told them to send messages to China that there was a monk coming and that they should take care of him when he arrived.

Is this true?
Is it not true?
I don't know.
Could happen…

And so when Bodhidharma did arrive in China after roughly a three year journey, a lot of it by sea, there was prior knowledge and people were wondering: "What is special about this guy that pigeons were sent? That we know about him? What is special about him?"

So he caused I guess a little bit of sensation.

Now one of the things they say is special about Bodhidharma is that he was born with a breathing disorder and from an early age was trained in breathing exercises and eventually in combat, Dravidian warfare arts.

Now, if that's true it would help to understand why and how certain exercises which have now been subsumed by the martial arts would have been apparently taught by Bodhidharma at Shaolin Temple when he arrived there.

Now, Bodhidharma apparently arrived in China in 470, maybe, the dates are difficult, they can't be nailed down, but the earlier one seems like the better one in light of later information as to when Bodhidharma

arrived at Shaolin Temple and when he established a temple himself of which there is a record in village records, which apparently in China are kept meticulously.

When he was asked why he came to China,
Bodhidharma said it was to transmit the instantaneous Teachings of the Mahayana.
Previously I read that quote saying that what he did not do was talk about “precepts, devotions, or ascetic practices”.
His was the action of sitting down and looking at the wall.

So people had heard about this monk that was quite special and
they wanted to hear from him
because let’s remember,

there wasn’t TV,
there wasn’t the internet,
there wasn’t movies,
there wasn’t radio,
and so on,

so when someone new arrived in the area and
they were from a foreign country,
you certainly wanted to hear what they had to say.

So there was a gathering and Bodhidharma showed up, the people were there, waiting for wise words from this Indian monk. This was in Nanjing, a famous place.

He walked in,
he sat down,
doing what we call “zazen”
for many hours.

The crowd of course grew restless.

[whispering:]
“What’s he…?”
“Did he say anything?”
“What’s going on?”

[louder]
“Oh gee, come on guy!”
“Come on”
“Say something!”
“…Say something!”

“Boooooo!”

“Hisssss”

So they were quite upset.

Not all.

There were some who were actually impressed.

So he got up and walked away.

Needless to say this did not cause people to stop talking about him.

He had another encounter at Flower Rain Pavilion in Nanjing. There was a monk, Shenguang, and I mentioned him before, and he was a renowned speaker and lecturer in Buddhism. Bodhidharma showed up there to listen to this monk lecture in Buddhism. He's sitting there not saying anything, he's nodding, yes yes, no no, nodding in disagreement but not saying anything. Apparently this infuriated the speaker who was quite a violent man and he ended up picking up his mala, word has it, threw it at Bodhidharma, hit him in the teeth, knocked out his two front teeth.

He started to bleed.
Bodhidharma wiped it away and

walked away.

He did not respond in kind.
He did not seem to get upset.
He just went about his business.

In the "Shodoka, the Song of Freedom " by Yoka Daishi, who wrote the "Song of Freedom"
190 years after Bodhidharma arrived in China,
there are a few quotes that when you hear them again
in the context of the whole poem,
you may remember and
it will give you a sense of the times and
the Teachings and this history,
and the ground that was broken
so that we have the understanding of practice
that we have right here right now.

> *If folks argue and slander you, let them:*
> *they are playing with fire, trying to burn the sky.*

Another quote:

> *Abusive words are disguised blessings*
> *and my abusers good teachers.*

Another one:

This mind has room for slander and abuse
and is itself unborn compassion and patience.

There's more when we look at the other five Chan or Zen Chinese Ancestors, so we can see how the Teachings developed and how they have been passed on.

After the encounter with Emperor Wu, the famous encounter with Emperor Wu, Bodhidharma went and walked, traveled and ended up in Shaolin Temple,
"BD"—as I affectionately call him now
after all this information,
I'm convinced now that
he was a real person and
it's interesting to see how
echoing through the ages
there are still popular remnants and appearances of this character.

Not only are there the zenga that we see here,
not only are there the many zenga or sho portraying Bodhidharma,
but there's even an action figure of Bodhidharma,
12 inches tall with several sets of hands
so that the different postures can be demonstrated for kung fu.

(And remember, we,
each morning at formal sittings
do the Daruma Kata Chi Kung)

but as somebody said:

"There is no zafu, there is no sitting tool with this action figure."

But it's a great figure,
and also
my spies,
my eyes
have told me that on a popular television series called "Boardwalk Empire"
there appears a portrait of Bodhidharma
in a brothel in early 20th century American Atlantic City.

So this character and
what he taught is still resounding and
that's pretty interesting.

I think I'll end here and we'll pick up with "Who: Bodhidharma, Part 2" during the next Dharma Talk on the Shodoka, "Wherever You Stand".

Thank you for listening.