Wherever You Stand 3: Who: Bodhidharma, Part 2

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Previously on “Wherever You Stand”…

We looked at Bodhidharma Part 1, Bodhidharma, the first of the Chinese Ancestors.

Why are we looking at him again?

Well because we look at him and he looks at us
each time we come to the Hatto,
each time we come to the Zendo,
each time we walk kinhin around the Hatto or the Zendo
and why is that?

Because this was a very influential individual,
and although through the chaotic times of history
this person was reduced to, in some cases,
a little doll with a round bottom,
a little daruma doll;
you push it over and
fwoop! It pops right up again…

So it was quite easy to make only a cartoon out of this character,
yet the more one looks,
the more one studies,
the more one reads things such as
“Bodhidharma’s Eyes” by Anzan Hoshin roshi,
the more the character fleshes itself out,
and this is definitely,
this person is definitely part of the history of Zen
and part of the history of the practice
that you are doing right now as you sit
facing the wall,
watching,
noticing,
knowing more and more clearly
that you are the Knowing,
and that everything that is known
is known by the bodymind.

To refresh your memory:
Bodhidharma was born a prince in southern India,
studied with Dharma Ancestor Prajnatara,

was told to go to China,
arrived approximately 479
Buddhism had already been in China since about 80 C.E.

He traveled, the voyage itself taking about three years.

He ended up at a place called Loyang, which was an active centre of Buddhist scholarship. Many Indian monks came there and they were busying themselves with the sutras, translating them into Chinese.

Now, as we've gathered, Bodhidharma was not particularly, let's say, devoted only to the study of sutras, and in fact there is a sentence which you have come across before which is attributed to Bodhidharma:

> *A special transmission outside of the sutras, not depending upon words or letters, direct pointing to the human mind, seeing into one's nature, becoming Buddha.*

Now it is said that this understanding was not viewed in a kindly light by many of the teachers who were engaged in the study of the sutras, and it may be that he was forced to leave that particular location and travel, begging, just to get away to a safe place.

He was very controversial, the subject of much debate.
Many stories were created after he lived
and both Japanese and Western scholars have downplayed his importance,
both when he was alive and after he died,
and there are some who even deny that he existed.

Many records of course were lost because in that area of the world
as in a lot of areas of the world,
history could be described with one word:
war.

I mean let's face it,
we've been at each other in various combinations
trying to kill each other off
for centuries.
So records would get lost.

So we have Bodhidharma leaving to Loyang,
the active centre of Buddhist studies,
where he had made himself unpopular.
[O-sensei laughs]

Let's say it's a good thing being a Zen Teacher is not a popularity contest…
[O-sensei and students laugh]

So, he ended up at Shaolin Temple, which had been founded in 495,
well we're not quite sure of the date,
scholars still argue over the dates of the arrival of Bodhidharma,

some going so far as to say that he was 100 years old when he arrived in the country,
but maybe that's just because people of different ethnicities age differently than other people…
who knows?

But he ended up in Shaolin Temple where it is said he sat for nine years.

The monks at Shaolin, according to some stories, were quite worried about him sitting out there in a cave in a mountain called, according to some, Breast Mountain. [O-sensei laughs] Apparently in front of Shaolin there are five mountains named for their shape: Bell, Drum, Sword, Stamp, and Flag, and behind the temple there are five Breast Mountains.

So Bodhidharma went into a cave in one of the Breast Mountains and sat there for nine years, legend has it, and legend also has it that so intense was his practice that his image was engraved on the wall in front of him. So please don't do that this morning. [students laugh]

And outside watching over him was Shenguang who we've run across before.
He kept guard, periodically asking Bodhidharma to teach him.
Bodhidharma emerged from the cave after nine years,
went to a room in the temple which had been prepared for him by the monks there,
and guess what?

Sat down, practised zazen for another four years.

Shenguang kept asking to be taught.
One story has it the response was:
"When red snow falls."
We'll hear more about that later.

So after, it would seem, after this 13 or 15 years at Shaolin may have been the time when Bodhidharma met Emperor Wu Dai of Liang who reigned from 502 to 549. Emperor Wu embraced and promoted Buddhism. He was a monk several times and he forced his court to purchase him back from time to time with handsome offerings. [O-sensei and students laugh] Then around 517 he ordered the destruction of the Daoist temples.

He disallowed corporal punishment and animal sacrifices. Some compare him to King Ashoka whom of course you all remember from amongst other places, the "Every Breath You Take" series. Some historians and scholars refers to Emperor Wu's reign as the Golden Age of Chinese Buddhism.

Bodhidharma is said to have encountered Emperor Wu around 520 and this matches with records recently found which indicate that Bodhidharma built or had built for him True Victory Temple in Tianchang in 522. It seems most likely, or it seems very likely in my opinion, that that would have been with the blessing of Emperor Wu.

Remember the story that Bodhidharma had been summoned to the court sometime, the records aren't clear or the writings aren't clear and this very story was written only around 758 in an appendix of a text by Shenhui, a disciple of Huineng, the sixth and last Chinese Ancestor, so the story really cannot be said to be historically accurate…

But he was summoned to meet with Emperor Wu

who told him of all the temples he had built
and the money and support he had given to the monastic community
and asked Bodhidharma:
“What merit have I gained?”

Bodhidharma looked out from under his apparently somewhat substantial eyebrows
with those big eyes
—which of course had generated other stories,
you all know about the tea bush—
but he looked out at the Emperor and said:

“None whatsoever.”

And the Emperor said: “Who are you to tell me these things?”

And Bodhidharma said: “I don’t know.”

So the story of their meeting as I said was recorded some 230 years later, so who knows exactly what was said? But obviously since we’re still talking about it here today, 2012, we have a picture of him on the wall, obviously something substantial occurred that caused a lot of people to flap their lips through the centuries and even to write it down, and to use this as an example of the clarity and “cut-throughingness” of Zen practice.

We do know by the very fact that we’re sitting here that what Bodhidharma taught is still resounding. That’s pretty good.

This temple, True Victory Temple, built in 522, apparently according to “Tracking Buddhism” a new book that’s out, is 60 miles north of Nanjing. Places that have been mentioned that Bodhidharma traveled, mentioned in different talks and stories, and the record there showing that this temple was founded by or Bodhidharma was the Abbot of, the records are still alive today.

The temple is gone, there is nothing left of True Victory Temple. The only artifact left is a well head in front of an appliance store that’s 1 metre across—not the store, the well head—1 metre across and a few inches high.

So this person, Bodhidharma, this rogue monk who just wanted to sit and who taught those who wanted to sit how to sit, menpek-kunin, menpeki, biguan, pikuan, or wall-gazing.

Those who were interested might like to read “Bodhidharma’s Eyes” by Anzan roshi.

So Bodhidharma taught, he practised, he taught.
Some say he had lots of followers.
Some say no one wanted to do the practice,
but don’t we feel like that often?
Yet we keep showing up…

And apparently some people did keep showing up.

Bodhidharma is known to have had four Dharma heirs, and there is a story which you have heard before:

> *One day Bodhidharma asked his four disciples what they had attained.*
>
> *Daofu said: "My present view is without being attached to the written word or being detached from the written word, one still engages in the work of the Way."*

So you do it.

> *Bodhidharma said: "You have my skin."*
>
> *Zongchi said (and she was the nun who had come to study with him): "It's like Ananda seeing the land of the Buddha Akshovia, seen once, it isn't seen again."*
>
> *Bodhidharma said: "You have my flesh."*
>
> *Daoyu said: "The four elements are originally empty, the five aggregates are non-existent, there is not a single dharma to attain."*
>
> *Bodhidharma said: "You have my bones."*
>
> *Huike made three bows and stood still.*
>
> *Bodhidharma said: "You have my marrow."*

He said that because Huike had the deepest understanding. And Huike would become the second Chinese Ancestor.

Next time, on "Wherever You Stand", we will look more deeply at the second Chinese Ancestor Huike.

All of this is so that we gain more of an understanding of the times in which these people lived and practised, which will enable us to provide more context around Yoka Daishi's "Shodoka, The Song of Freedom".

Thank you for listening.