

Wherever You Stand 4: Who: Dazu Huike

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Previously in “Wherever You Stand”;
we left Bodhidharma standing with his four disciples,
four students and he had asked the question:
“What have you understood?”
and the fourth disciple made three bows and stood still.

Bodhidharma looked at him with those eyes and those eyebrows,
which you can see on the zenga hanging on the Hatto wall,
and said: “You have my marrow”
meaning you are the closest to me in your understanding
and that fourth disciple became Huike,
the Second Chinese Ancestor.

Now there are stories that differ somewhat as to who this person was and where he came from. The dates are pretty well 487 birth to his death around 593, but what he did for the first 40 years of his life is not exactly clear because as we know by now, many of the records that may have been kept had been wiped out as there was conflict in the areas.

So stories are passed down, people wrote books, they kept records, like “The Stories of Imminent Monks”...then there was-
...Emminent, not Imminent! [students and Sensei laugh]
Do we have any imminent monks in the room? [more laughter]
Great.

Okay, Keizan zenji wrote about Huike, along with the other Ancestors, in the Denkoroku, but that was written 1268-ish to 1325-ish, somewhere in there. Now we all know about stories, about how they get started: there is an incident, something happens, someone’s there, a lot of people aren’t there, but they may hear bits and pieces and then they fill in the blanks according to what they think might have happened. I’m sure we’ve all had direct experience of this type of thing occurring, but since I’m the one talking, I’ll tell you one.

About 35 years ago, I was working in a small African country as a communications consultant. I was working for a foreign government, and I was “up country”, meaning I was away from almost everybody. One morning, for some reason or another, the radio that I was supposed to have on all the time, which was connected to the project centre, wasn’t working. So, no problem, I fed the mongoose, fed the kitten, fed myself, got in my project jeep and headed up this rutted, muddy road towards the radio station to meet the indigenous producers and technicians and I had barely left my driveway when a hand reached into my jeep, grabbed my keys from me, pulled me out of the jeep, threw me in the ditch and took off with my jeep and some money and there I was left...kind of bemused, let’s say, and finally I made my way by foot up to the radio station where the guys had been wondering what had gone on with me because there was an alleged coup occurring and we were living in the area which was the home area of the head of state.

I also found out later that my next door neighbour, who was known as “the Leopard” was apparently the only man in the country that the head of state was afraid of.

The project did not know this when they put me in that particular house. [laughter] People, huh? People! [laughter]

So then I was taken by motorcycle to a safe house and waited a couple of days for the one jet in the country to be sent up to pick me up, and finally I heard it, the guys came, put me on the motorcycle, whoosh through the red dust, down to the airfield, two gigantic guys basically almost dragged me by my elbows, with my toes trailing through the dust, into the jet, into the capital city, and I was whisked off to the ambassador’s residence. I spent a good length of time staying at the ambassador’s residence. In the daytime I would go to the embassy grounds, sit around the pool, drink, smoke cigarettes, I was having a whale of a time. [laughter]

And there were rumours, rumours and stories... “There was this consultant who had been up country who had been raped by a battalion of people and who had been very badly beaten up...”

I thought: “My god, that’s terrible!” Didn’t take very long for me to find out they were talking about me. [more laughter]

None of those things had happened, but people filled in bits and pieces so I have a great deal of tolerance and understanding for stories.

So we have Huike, who apparently was born “Shenguang”, and Anzan roshi in the Denkoroku says that Huike was of the Ji clan, and as often happens, before he was born, apparently, his parents being childless, used to wonder, “how come we don’t have any children?” Well one night there was...guess what? A big light, a strange light brightening the room and the wife conceived and the child was born who was named Shenguang, or “Light”. This is what he was known as growing up. He received ordination as a Buddhist monk from meditation Master Baojing, and then went travelling to hear lectures and studied the principles of both the Hinayana and Mahayana.

Now, another story has it that he was a general, that he had been a general and let’s say he’d been responsible for the loss of life of many people. Is that true? I don’t know.

Another story has it that he, as a monk was lecturing in a square of a temple, and I’ve mentioned this before in previous Dharma Talks; he was lecturing and Bodhidharma was sitting listening, nodding when he agreed, and nodding when he didn’t agree, and the “didn’t agree” may have in fact been more prevalent than the agreeing because for some reason or other the story has it that Shenguang took his iron mala and knocked out Bodhidharma’s teeth, his two front teeth, and Bodhidharma being a nice guy, apparently, swallowed them, and kind of walked away rather than becoming confrontational, and this in fact, really affected Shenguang to the point where he wanted to study with this person.

Another story has it that Shenguang met Bodhidharma only at Shaolin Temple, that for around 40 years he had been a scholar in Luoyang and he went to Shaolin to ask this learned monk from India to teach him so he could master the depths of the Dharma. Whenever he asked a question he received only silence until one day in December, he had been standing all night in the cold in front of BD’s window, Bodhidharma said:

“Why have you been standing in the snow?”

And he said: "I want to study with you."

And Bodhidharma may or may not have said something to the effect of, "well that will happen when the snow is red" according to some stories, at which point Shenguang hacked off his left arm.

Now there are various commentaries, including Joshu roshi's commentary on whether this did or didn't happen. Apparently when Anzan Hoshin roshi asked him whether this had actually happened, he said:

"Don't be asshole!" [O-sensei and students laugh]

Another story has it, a middle aged monk named Shenguang had been told by divine spirits that Bodhidharma could liberate him from confusion. He stands outside the cave, Bodhidharma is sitting, he stands there for days in the snow to demonstrate his resolve. Bodhidharma scolds him but he won't leave. He asks Bodhidharma to pacify his mind.

Bodhidharma says: "Show me this mind."

Shenguang says: "I look for it but I cannot find it."

Bodhidharma says: "I have pacified your mind"

Shenguang was accepted by Bodhidharma and receives the Dharma name Huike.

Now, which one of these are true? Well there's the essence of truth in all of them. There was this person who at some point met Bodhidharma, he had already been studying a lot of the sutras and so on, the different schools, he was already quite learned, but apparently there wasn't a lot of practice going on, there wasn't a lot of wall gazing happening.

So Bodhidharma did take him on as a student and at 40, it is said, he received transmission. That's one story. He was told by Bodhidharma to go into hiding because certain Vinaya masters and sutras masters who had made six attempts on the life of Bodhidharma wanted to kill his students. So it's said he went into hiding for 40 years, Huike did, but during that time, he did have students and he did, according to some, give transmission. Some say that he only began teaching at 80. Whatever the actual facts may be, which we most probably will never know, he did teach and he did eventually pass on the robe and bowl which he had received in transmission from Bodhidharma to Sengcan.

Then, it is said, he went drinking, carousing like a wild man, visiting brothels. When asked how he could do such things, he said: "What business is it of yours?" and this attitude, this understanding that we can basically only mind our own business seems to have been passed along, and there are records of Dogen zenji when he came to China meeting the old monk drying mushrooms:

Dogen said: "Let me find a younger monk to help you do that."

The old dude said: "Others are not me, I heard that you came to China for the purpose of the Great Way. You should thoroughly investigate the self. The moment you looked at me, you were already looking the other way, delusioning yourself, losing sight of yourself by worrying about others is foolish. You don't understand the significance of seeing. Without engaging the self, just look! That is what shugyo is, you can't see that I'm simply doing this, so don't say foolish things. Another person's practice is their own business."

Well, now it is said with Huike, he sometimes feigned insanity to lessen the jealousy of these rivals who were the disciples of Bodhirushin vinaya master Tiongquan but he still taught anyone willing to be taught. Many people trusted him but there were many rivals still jealous and they reported him to the governor of that particular area, accusing him of being weird and inhuman and confusing people. Huike was arrested and locked up and questioned.

“Are you human or a freak?” asked the magistrate.

“I’m a freak!” Huike said, according to some.

The magistrate knew he was saying that to avoid creating more jealousy, however, the magistrate implored him: “Tell me the truth.”

He said: “I’m a freak!” and he would not step back from that assertion, basically that he was not going to change his ways.

Now apparently a lot of this type of story were from a biography of Bodhidharma written in the late Tang or early Sung period, that’s 800 to 1100.

So again, stories, stories, they get told and they get embroidered but they can often give the essence of a particular approach.

Huike was sentenced to die. He wept when he told his disciples, sad that the Buddhadharma as taught by Bodhidharma was not understood in his lifetime and wouldn’t flourish until the time of the fourth Chan Ancestor. So he had already given transmission to the Third Chan Ancestor.

“Come and kill me,” he said to the executioner who raised his axe and swung. It is said that white fluid flowed onto the chopping block. Probably not, but mythologies say that when a sage enters the white yang realm, there’s no yin left. This was a definite influence of Daoist beliefs that had been around at the time.

Now, some of you have heard mention of that white fluid instead of blood in the teisho during the O-sesshin about Sri Simha. So stories can travel. Something sounds like something and it makes sense, but whatever happened, after the Emperor saw his face which hadn’t changed in death, he is said to have remembered Sri Simha who when beheaded didn’t bleed, no outflows. The belief: when one has no ignorance, one may attain a state without outflows, enter the white yang realm.

Now people say how could Huike attain yang if he was so angry? Huike’s anger was not a petty anger, his anger was wisdom, great patience, great knowledge, great courage, great wisdom.

Now the Emperor felt shame, realizing he had killed a Bodhisattva and even though Huike was dead, the Emperor ordered his officials to take refuge, he had been so impressed with Huike and the manner of his death.

So we will leave Huike dead, the Emperor and the populace impressed, and we will return in the next Dharma Talk, bring Huike alive again so he can give transmission to the Third Chinese Ancestor

And remember: another person’s practice is their own business. When you’re pointing your finger, three other fingers are pointing back at you.

Have fun and thank you for listening.