Wherever You Stand 5: Who: Jianzhi Sengcan

Dharma Talk by Ven. Shikai Zuiko O-sensei
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Thank you, thank you very much
for coming to your seat today,
for sitting on your zafu in front of that wall
being breathed in and out
like so many have done before you
to uncover who you are
really
before all your stupid stories about who you are…

They're just thoughts,
contractions of self-image
into a belief about how you are
and how the world is.

The antidote?
Feel the breath
feel the whole bodymind,
notice the other 99% of reality
that happens to be happening at that moment.

This is what this Lineage taught.
It's very simple.
It's very elegant
but it's not easy
so thank you again for showing up today.

Previously, on "Wherever You Stand",
we were looking at the stories of the Chinese Ancestors
starting with Bodhidharma
who was born around 440 C.E. and died 534, 536
and then Huike, his Dharma heir, 487 to 593 C.E.,
and today:
Jianzhi Sengcan.

Why am I doing it this way?
Because as with any historical situation,
as with anything that has a lineage, a track,
what went before influences what comes today.

So far we've seen that a common factor is that these individuals, they were really living breathing people who wanted to find out what was going on…

really.

They traveled around, then entered into situations, they left situations because they weren't satisfied with what they were seeing and hearing, what was being taught to them. So that is some sort of common factor.

They were influenced by what was going on in the culture around them, and during this period of time, I'm sure you'll be fascinated to know, that backgammon was invented in another part of the world, and toilet paper was invented in China. [O-sensei and students laugh]

Which is more important? Well… [more laughter]

Now Jianzhi Sengcan, there are few details about this individual. His birth name, apparently, is not known, he died around 606 A.D. or C.E. and he was the Third Chinese Ancestor in this Lineage, that would be the 30th after Gautama Siddartha, the Buddha, but again this Lineage, tracing right back to Gautama Siddartha may or may not be accurate. Who can tell? Nobody can tell. There are no databases to go to to check it out.

We do know that he was a lay man and that he was interested in the Dharma. Some say that he showed up and met Huike, who was very impressed with this layman's knowledge and capacity for the Dharma, so that he shaved his head and took him on as a student.

There are stories, as there always are, it seems… He may have been 40 years old, he may have met Huike in 536 or 551, he may have studied with him for two or six or nine years, but the length of time doesn't really matter. A prevailing story that has gone on, that he met Huike and he said:

"I am riddled with sickness, please absolve me of my sins."

Huike said: "Bring your sin here and I will absolve you."

Sengcan: "When I look for my sin, I cannot find it."

Huike: "I have absolved you. You should live by the Three Jewels."

Now, we've heard that story before, haven't we? Different people.

In the Denkoroku as put forth by Zen Master Anzan Hoshin, the koan is:

> *The Thirtieth Ancestor was Great Master Jianzhi. Sengcan says to the Twenty-ninth Ancestor Huike, "I am being stricken with illness by heaven. Please Master, absolve me of my defilement."*
>
> *The Ancestor says, "Bring me your defilement and I will absolve you of it."*
>
> *After a long pause, Sengcan says, "When I look for my defilement, there is nothing that can be found."*
>
> *The Ancestor replies, "I have absolved you of defilement. You should live by the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha."*

In another story, it was referred to as "sins". In any case, he had a problem and some say that his problem was leprosy, that he suffered from leprosy and it is said that after Huike, impressed by his capacity shaved his head and gave him the name Sengcan, which means "Jewel of the Sangha", he practised, he studied and

after two years or six years or nine years, he was transmitted the precepts on the 18th day of the third month. He was given by Huike the robe, which had been given to Huike by Bodhidharma, and that not long after his illness abated.

Did that actually happen? Well who knows?

Certainly it could have because as we all know,
when the fact of the reality of experience becomes more and more apparent to us,
in that we're not the bodymind,
we're the Knowing of the bodymind,
bodymind is how anything at all is known,
also we've all experienced the fact that when we focus on what's wrong with us,
guess what kids?
It gets bigger,
it gets worse
and it makes it impossible for us to do what we need to do.

Now, I'm not saying that this is about healing,
because we certainly don't want that kind of word to get out,
but when we notice that we're obsessed by our sore knee,
when we're obsessed by the fact that we have a cold or a cough,
well we notice that this golden opportunity to practise,
shows us that when attention goes into any aspect of experiencing,
it seems to get bigger,
it seems to get worse.

When we remember that that is a known,
a dharma,
a moment of experience,
something being experienced by the bodymind,
and we, the Knowing of that experience
feel the breath
open the eye gaze
feel the whole bodymind,
there's an opening
in that that moment of experiencing is less obstructed by that contraction.

That's reality.

And as I've said numerous times (so I hope it's true) the medical community seems to be picking up on that mindfulness is a good thing. Mindfulness helps people be more fully who they are and helps them release contraction and abstraction and obsession on stupid moments of experiencing like who they are and what's going on in the world.

So here you are at the epicentre, that's it.

Now, back to Sengcan;

because we're looking at that also,
we're looking at how these Ancestors were,
how they were thinking,
they were thinking,
what type of people they were,

so that when we come to Yoka daishi
who wrote the "Shodoka", "The Song of Freedom",
you will have some idea of the richness
of the Lineage which informed that long poem.

This is a Lineage of, basically, poets and artists, people who are interested and interesting and not fooled by prevailing wisdom as to what's going on, and seem to have each one, in their own way, confronted persecution.

Sengcan himself, it is said, after being given Transmission by Huike, was told to go and live in the mountains because at that time there was a persecution of Buddhists, that's around 574. Rumour is that Sengcan feigned mental illness to escape execution and he went into hiding for ten years on Mount Wangong and eventually during that time, around 592 or 594, he met Daoxin who became his Dharma heir.

It's also said that Jianzhi Sengcan in his wanderings was able to calm wild tigers by his presence. This impressed local people who had been caused a lot of fear by wild tigers coming into their villages. Is that true? Don't know.

It's said now that Sengcan met Daoxin, who studied with him for nine years, we won't go into that too much, otherwise I'll have nothing to say next week. He taught Daoxin, then he spent two years at Mount Luofu in Canton, returned to Wangong mountain and died in 606 while sitting under a tree at a Dharma Assembly.

I wish! [O-sensei laughs]

His grave was found in Shu-chou in 746 and he received honors from the emperor, the Tang dynasty emperor Xuan Zong.

It is said that Jianzhi Sengcan wrote the "Xinxin Ming", it has been attributed to him, but again scholars have all kinds of thing to say about that. Anzan roshi translated that title as "Words on Mind" and for those who are interested there is material available by Anzan Hoshin roshi about the "Xinxiin Ming", Sengcan said:

"The Vast Way is without difficulty, just don't accept or reject."

Now he was influenced by the cultures around him and Daoist culture was prevalent at the time. This travels over the years from Teacher to student, person to person, and in the "Shodoka: The Song of Freedom" written by Yoka daishi in 713, the opening is this:

> *Have you ever seen one of the Way?*
>
> *Beyond action and beyond learning,*
> *one is at ease,*

not struggling against delusion
or grasping after the truth.

One sees the nature of ignorance
to be itself Essential Awareness,

and the illusion of one's own body
is the Realm of Reality.

So, there you are.

Here you are,
right now,
sitting in front of that white wall,
practising.

You're not struggling against delusion,
or you're not grasping after the truth,
but you're recognizing those moments
when that occurs,
be it on the zafu,
or be it when you're standing having coffee,
or be it when you're driving your car,
or be it when you're waiting to be called in the waiting room,
or be it when you're wondering what you're going to wear…

any time whatsoever you have this moment
when a known,
a dharma,
a moment of experiencing is recognized
that shows you that it is happening right now,
that it is happening where it is always happening,
where it has happened ever since
and where it will happen:
right now
this moment,
it's always this moment.

Feel the breath
sit up straight,
recognize

this moment.

Thank you for listening.