Wherever You Stand 8: Who: Dajian Huineng Part 1

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Dainen-ji, January 19th, 2013

Previously on “Wherever You Stand”…

We’ve been introduced to the “Shodoka” by Yoka daishi, the verses that we’re looking into by looking into the six Chinese Chan Ancestors, their ways of thinking, their travels, what they were looking for.

So we’ve looked at Bodhidharma,
and the snow today coming down softly
reminded me of Huike,
who it is said waited outside
Bodhidharma’s cave
to be accepted as a student
after travelling goodness knows how far.

We have
Sengcan,
Daoxin,
Hongren…

Now these people, like you, were looking for a true Teacher.
They travelled many miles, great distances
like some of you have.

Bodhidharma came from India to China so that he could teach.
Huike followed Bodhidharma.

Some of you have travelled great distances
literally and metaphorically.
Some monks have immigrated from distant lands.
Sounds strange, doesn’t it,
to refer to Britain as a “distant land”,
to refer to India as a “distant land”,
to refer to Turkey as a “distant land”?

The language may be different,
but the fact of the matter is,
even though it may be easier to go back and forth,
we can still quite accurately call these lands
“distant lands”.

People were looking to find out what is true
about experiencing.

Today we're going to look at Dajian Huineng, Part 1.

He is the 33rd Dharma Ancestor and the Sixth and last of the founding Ancestors of Chan.
He is considered by many scholars to be the most important
but how do you determine that?
Was he more important than the people that came before?
Did he come up with innovative ideas on his own?
No,
he was fed by that stream,
he was fed by the stream of the people who came before.

He was born in 638 C.E., died in 713 and was mummified.

"Hmm hmmm." [students laugh]

Most modern scholars, or many, or some
doubt the historicity of the traditional biographies and works about Huineng.

Now, one story:
he was born into the poor Lu family in 638, the father died when he was young and the family was so poor that he had no opportunity to learn to read or write and was illiterate his whole life.

In Keizan zenji's "Denkoroku", as translated by Joshu roshi and Anzan Hoshin roshi, the father was a government appointee who lost his job and the family was sent to the wilds of the south.

In any case, Huineng chopped wood, hulled rice, milled rice. He was a worker and apparently illiterate his whole life.

The "Platform Sutra" of the Sixth Ancestor is attributed to Huineng.
That's interesting.
You think, well how could he come up with this sutra if he couldn't read or write?

A very important thing to remember
is that many people couldn't read or write
but there were very strong oral traditions,
stories were told,
those who learned sutras would recite them,
people around would listen.

So as with many of the Teachings, they were heard and written down by disciples.
Here's where the problem comes in;
sometimes the people who wrote them down,
as with the Buddha,
were writing them down like 200 years later,
so they've gone through many minds
and many mouths.

Now, this is a quote from John McRae, written in 2003, "Seeing Through Zen" was the book:

> *The Platform sutra was a melange of early Chan teachings, a virtual repository of the entire tradition up to the second half of the 8th century. At the heart of the sermon—*

…is the same understanding of the Buddhanature that we have seen attributed to Bodhidharma and Hongren, including the idea that the fundamental Buddhanature is only made invisible to ordinary humans by their illusions.

So, Buddhanature,
something every human being has,
only seems to be hidden
because of the illusions,
delusions,
the patterns,
the obsessions,
the fixations
we have propagated
with the bodymind
about Reality.

Not just those of long ago, but you sitting here right now, have encoded in the cells of the bodymind various patterns and habits, which if you take them seriously, and by "taking them seriously" I'm saying if you allow attention to go into them and to feed them, you are propagating illusions and delusions which cut you off from the actual Nature of experiencing, cut you off from Buddhanature.

What can you do about it?

Oh it's easy:
biguan,
wall-gazing,
zazen.

You sit with your legs folded,
your hands neatly in the mudra,
eyes open looking at a wall,
noticing when you notice,
(because you cannot notice what you're not noticing)
which does not mean that you do not have the capacity to eventually notice,

so you notice what you notice

at that moment of clear seeing:
"Oh, that's a thought"
Feel the breath
sit up straight
and that interrupts that pattern
and eventually, over time,

the structures, the neural networks change
and the actual Buddhanature is seen
more and more clearly.

Now we all know,
we've all heard,
and of course we all remember in this moment:
dukkha, bad space.

So when we are allowing attention to go into these patterns, these habits,
and I'm saying "allowing" because
sometimes we do allow it,
self-image will come up and say:

"Oh this is really this way or that way… This is boring, why doesn't she shut up?… What I'm going to do is I'm going to picture what it's going to be like when I go skiing later today…"

And so we may make a decision to consciously engage ourself in that thought about something that's not going on right now.

As soon as you see it:
feel the breath
feel the whole bodymind.

You won't lose the thought. If it's a good idea, you won't lose that good idea, it'll come back again.

So as we practise zazen, which this whole Chan Lineage did, we get a chance to see more and more clearly the actual nature of experiencing.

When we make the decision to practise at the moment of seeing anything whatsoever,
we're snatching that teat of attention
out of the mouth of self-image,
we're not feeding it,
we're not propagating it,
we're cutting through those habits and delusions and patterns
that get in our way
that cause the fundamental Buddhanature to be obscured.

All of you have had a hint of this,
a way long time ago,
that was that hint of this,
that hint of the clarity that's possible through practice
and that's spoken of
that ended up with you sitting your butts down on a zafu
in this room
in this Hatto,
right here right now,

noticing moments of experiencing,
or knowns, dharma,
and remembering when you remember
to feel the breath and to sit up straight,
to practise the whole bodymind in the whole moment.

You're practising what
Bodhidharma,
Huike,
Sengcan,
Daoxin,
Hongren,
and
Huineng
actually taught.

Now back to Huineng:
In the "Denkoroku" it's said that Huineng had a realization listening to someone reciting the "Diamond sutra",
a customer in the store where he was chopping wood,
or where wood was being sold that he had chopped.
He heard a customer reciting the Diamond sutra and
he experienced an awakening.

In the "Denkoroku" it says that there was the recognition: "Give rise to the mind that dwells nowhere."

Now, that phrase is on a banner, a rubbing in the hallway that goes to the Shuryo, "Give rise to the mind that dwells nowhere."

So Huineng heard a customer reciting the "Diamond sutra" and experienced an awakening.
He decided to seek out a Teacher and
he had heard about the Fifth Ancestor Hongren at Huangmei Mountain.
So he made up his mind to go there,
he made up his mind to travel so that
he could find out what's really going on.

Now, some later stories say that a customer gave him money to travel, which was nice, and he walked for a month to find Hongren on Huangmei Mountain.

Sometimes we get, you know, a little concerned about walking down the block to get to the… [laughter]
And here we are, it's nice and warm.

Now these guys, these old guys,
they didn't have a furnace in the monastery.
No.
They didn't have lights in the monastery.
They didn't have hot water in the monastery.

Picture it:
no light, no heat, and the wind blowing through.
This is luxury.

Now in the “Denkoroku”, Keizan zenji’s account, written, and then translated by Anzan Hoshin roshi and Joshu roshi, it’s said that on Huineng’s search for a true Teacher, he met an educated man whose mother-in-law was a nun, Wujin Cang, and she was devoted to continually chanting the “Nirvana Discourse”. After Huineng listened to it, he began to talk about its meaning. The nun took up the text and asked him about certain words.

Huineng it is said, replied:
“I can’t read, but I know the meaning.”

The nun said:
“If you can’t read, how can you understand what it means?”

Huineng:
“The Buddha’s subtle principles are not bound within written words.”

This is something that resounds through Bodhidharma’s Lineage.

Dongshan Liangjie daosho in the “Hokyo Zanmai” wrote:

> *Its meaning is not in words*
> *but it answers sincere questioning.*

This was written in 850 C.E., about a hundred and some years after the death of Huineng.

In Yoka daishi’s “Shodoka”:

> *Its silence speaks, its speech is silent.*
> *Its great giving opens the door wide.*
>
> *If you ask me what doctrine I teach*
> *I’ll tell you it’s Vast Awareness.*

So we can start to see the streams of information that flow through the Lineage,
right up to this very day.

So Huineng kept on travelling after meeting the nun, and he met another meditation teacher, some stories have it, who because Huineng seemed unusually clear, sent him on to Hongren whose Lineage was Bodhidharma’s.

This is from the “Denkoroku”:
Huineng went and found Hongren who asked where he came from.
Huineng said: “From the south.’

The Master:
“What is it you seek?”

Huinen
“I’m just looking for Buddhahood.”

Master Hongren:
“Those in the south have no Buddha Nature, how could you become a Buddha?” [quiet laughs]

Huineng said:
“While we can talk about ‘north’ or ‘south’ in terms of people, how can that apply to Buddha Nature?”

Now, a little sidebar here: in the “Sandokai”, and those of you who have been present for Sesshin and chanted through the “Sandoka” will recognize this:

> *Whether wise or dull may be found*
> *still in this Way there is no north or south.*

This of course refers to the North School and the South School, refers to beliefs.

The Master, Hongren, saw that Huineng was not of the usual crowd and set him to work in the monastery mill, hulling rice. Huineng worked there diligently, pounding rice for eight months.

Another translation, which is of the first chapter of the Ming Canon version of the “Platform sutra” gives a description of the introduction of Huineng to Hongren.

> *The Patriarch…*

Sidebar: Anzan roshi changed the word ‘Patriarch’ to ‘Ancestor’ in the 1980s, reasons for which should be obvious.

> *The Patriarch asked me,*
> *Who are you and what do you seek?”*
>
> *I replied,*
> *“Your disciple is a commoner from Xinzhou of Lingnan. I have travelled far to pay homage to you and seek nothing other than Buddhahood.”*
>
> *“So you’re from Lingnan, and a barbarian! How can you expect to become a Buddha?” asked the Patriarch.*
>
> *I replied,*
> *“Although people exist as northerners and southerners, in the Buddha-nature there is neither north nor south. A barbarian differs from Your Holiness physically, but what difference is there in our Buddha-nature?*

Now, I've said frequently in daisan and in Dharma Talks:
the process of being a human being is the same for all human beings.

Oh of course there are minor aesthetic or mechanical differences, but the process is the same:
Sperm-egg
Whoosh! down the shoot
Waaah!
[laughter]
Eating
shitting
in some cases reproducing
then dying at a certain point.

The process is the same.

The meaning we make depends on individual history:
when we were born,
what point in history we were born,
where we were born,
into what circumstances.
The meaning we make varies,
but the process is the same,
always has been.

Back to Huineng:
he became a labourer in the monastery, doing chores in the rice mill, chopping wood and pounding rice for the next eight months.

Now we get to the exciting part, the successor of Hongren. The "Platform sutra", the "Denkoroku" contain the stories of the succession of Huineng, his Transmission from Hongren.

There is some controversy there
and there was at the time.
There was a poetry contest and
it's said that Huineng won the contest,
received Transmission
but had to run to avoid the rage of the followers of his rival.
We'll look into that further next time.

We'll also look into where is the mummified body of Huineng today?

Stay tuned…

Thank you for listening.