

BODHI DHARMA



Bodhidharma was a Buddhist monk who lived during the 5th or 6th century CE. He is traditionally credited as the transmitter of Ch'an to China, and regarded as its first Chinese patriarch. According to Chinese legend, he also began the physical training of the Shaolin monks that led to the creation of Shaolin Kung Fu. The accounts also differ on the date of his arrival, with one early account claiming that he arrived during the Liú Sòng Dynasty (420–479) and later accounts dating his arrival to the Liáng Dynasty (502–557). Bodhidharma was primarily active in the lands of the Northern Wèi Dynasty (386–534). Modern scholarship dates him to about the early 5th century.[18] Several stories about Bodhidharma have become popular legends, which are still being used in the Ch'an and Zen tradition. Bodhidharma's teachings and practice centered on meditation and the Lankavatara Sutra. The Anthology of the Patriarchal Hall identifies Bodhidharma as the 28th Patriarch of Buddhism in an uninterrupted line that extends all the way back to the Buddha himself.

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Where & when born

Little contemporary biographical information on Bodhidharma is extant, and subsequent accounts became layered with legend. The [principal Chinese sources](#) vary on their account of Bodhidharma's origins, giving either an origin from India or from the [Greco-Buddhist](#) traditions of [Iranian language](#) speaking [Central Asian kingdoms](#). Throughout [Buddhist art](#), Bodhidharma is depicted as a rather ill-tempered, profusely bearded and wide-eyed barbarian. He is referred to as "The Blue-Eyed [Barbarian](#)" in Chinese Chan texts. Aside from the Chinese accounts, [several popular traditions](#) also exist regarding Bodhidharma's origins.

Brief history of the person -personal

Modern Scholars suggest that Bodhidharma being the favorite son of the South Indian Pallava King. In early years, Bodhidharma realized that he was not interested in a life of politics. He chose instead to study with the famous Buddhist master Prajnatarā and become a Buddhist monk.

Bodhidharma trained with his master for many years. One day he asked his master, "Master, when you pass away, where I should go? What should I do?" His master replied that he should go to Zhen Dan, which was the name for China at that time. Years later, Bodhidharma's master passed away and Bodhidharma traveled to China perhaps in the late 5th century. According to traditional accounts, Bodhidharma's journey to China is said to have taken three years by boat. His most famous encounter in China was with the Emperor Wu of Liang. About 520 AD he was granted an interview with the Nan (Southern) Liang emperor Wudi, who was noted for his good works. According to a famous story about their meeting, the emperor inquired how much merit (positive karma) he had accrued by building Buddhist monasteries and temples. To the emperor's dismay, Bodhidharma stated that good works performed with the intention of accumulating merit were without value, as they would result in favourable rebirths but would not bring about enlightenment. Another story states that, soon after meeting the emperor, Bodhidharma was expelled from the court and traveled further north, crossing the Yangtze River. He stopped at the Shaolin temple at Mt. Song but was refused entry, and is said to have subsequently sat in meditation outside the monastery facing its walls (or in a nearby cave in other accounts) for nine years. The monks were so impressed with his dedication to his zazen that he was finally granted entry. This episode elucidates a central theme of Zen practice: the almost exclusive value placed on zazen (sitting meditation) and the resulting self-realization. Once inside, he was dismayed by how weak and tired the Shaolin monks had become from their studying

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and meditation without any physical labor. To rectify the situation, he is said to have instituted a set of exercises for the monks to promote their physical health. As a result, Bodhidharma is said to have created the foundation of many schools of Chinese martial arts.

Principles & Practices in Spiritual Life

His teachings point to a direct experience of Buddha-Nature rather than an intellectual understanding of it, and he is best known for his terse style that infuriated some (such as Emperor Wu of Liang), while leading others to enlightenment. His life and teachings continue to be an inspiration to practitioners of Zen Buddhism today, and he exemplifies hard work, discipline and determination on the path to spiritual realization. Below is an example of his teachings to a dedicated disciple.

Shen Guang was a famous general one time. Something changed his mind one day to train as a Buddhist monk. Eventually, Shen Guang became a great speaker on Buddhism. One day Shen Guang met Da Mo and began following after Da Mo. While Da Mo walked towards north until he reached the Yangzi river and approached an old woman by the river side with a large bundle of reeds next to her. Da Mo asked her if he might have a reed. She replied that he might. Da Mo took a single reed, placed it upon the surface of the Yangzi river and stepped onto the reed. He was carried across the Yangzi river by the force of his chi. Seeing this, Shen Guang ran up to where the old woman sat and grabbed a handful of reeds without asking. He threw the reeds onto the Yangzi river and stepped onto them. The reeds sank beneath him and Shen Guang began drowning. The old woman saw his plight and took pity on Shen Guang, pulling him from the river. She said that by not asking for her reeds before taking them, he had shown her disrespect and that by disrespecting her, Shen Guang had disrespected himself. The old woman also told Shen Guang that he had been searching for a master and that Da Mo, the man he was following, was that master.

After that event Shen Guang continued following after Da Mo and became a guard for him later when Da Mo was in meditation for nine years sitting opposite to a cave wall behind Shaolin Temple. When the Shaolin monks decided to do something more for Da Mo they invited Da Mo to their temple. Da Mo did not respond but walked down to the room, sat down, and immediately began meditating. Shen Guang followed Da Mo to the Shaolin temple and stood guard outside Da Mo's room. Da Mo meditated in his room for another four years. At the end of another four-year period Shen Guang in anger and frustration demanded Da Mo to teach him on one winter night. Da Mo responded that he would teach Shen Guang when red snow fell from the sky. Hearing this, Shen Guang took the sword he carried from his belt and cut off his left arm. He held the severed arm above his head and whirled it around. The blood from the arm froze in the cold air and fell like red snow. Seeing this, Da Mo agreed to teach Shen Guang.

Da Mo took a monk's spade and went with Shen Guang to the Drum Mountain in front of Shaolin Temple. The Drum Mountain is so called because it is very flat on top. Da Mo's unspoken message to Shen Guang was that Shen Guang should flatten his heart, just like the surface of the Drum Mountain. On this Drum Mountain Da Mo dug a well. The water of this well was bitter. Da Mo then left Shen Guang on the Drum

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Mountain. For an entire year, Shen Guang used the bitter water of the well to take care of all of his needs. At the end of the first year, Shen Guang went down to Da Mo and again asked Da Mo to teach him. Da Mo returned with Shen Guang to the Drum Mountain and dug a second well. The water of this well was spicy. For an entire year, Shen Guang used the spicy water for all of his needs. At the end of the second year, Shen Guang went to Da Mo and asked again to be taught. Da Mo dug a third well on the Drum Mountain. The water of this third well was sour. For the third year, Shen Guang used the sour water for all of his needs. At the end of the third year, Shen Guang returned to Da Mo and asked again to be taught. Da Mo returned to the Drum Mountain and dug a fourth and final well. The water of this well was sweet. At this point, Shen Guang realized that the four wells represented life. Like the wells, his life would sometimes be bitter, sometimes sour, sometimes spicy and sometimes sweet. Each of these phases in his life was equally beautiful and necessary, just as each of the four seasons of the year is beautiful and inevitable and necessary in its own way to carry forward. Thus without really saying any words to Shen Guang, Da Mo had taught Shen Guang the most important of lessons in a mind-to-mind, heart-to-heart fashion. This mind-to-mind, heart-to-heart communication is called "action language" and is the foundation of the Chan Buddhism which Da Mo began at the Shaolin Temple. After his realization, Shen Guang was given the name Hui Ke and he became abbot of the Shaolin temple after Da Mo.

Spiritual Works

Bodhidharma was not a prolific writer or philosopher like other Buddhist figures, yet the central elements of his teachings can be seen in stories of his life such as his emphasis on zazen, his style of interacting with students (often referred to as "dharma-dueling" and found in many koans), the lack of emphasis on scholarship and intellectual debate, and the importance of personal realization and mind-to-mind transmission from teacher to disciple. These distinctive features that Bodhidharma brought from India to China almost 1,500 years ago still define Zen Buddhism today.

Tradition holds that Bodhidharma's principal text was the Lankavatara Sutra, a development of the Yogacara or "Mind-only" school of Buddhism established by the Gandharan half-brothers Asanga and Vasubandhu. He is described as a "master of the Lankavatara Sutra," and an early history of Zen in China is titled Record of the Masters and Disciples of the Lankavatara Sutra (Chinese, Leng-ch'ieh shih-tzu chi). Some sources go so far as to credit Bodhidharma with being the first to introduce this sutra to China. This emphasis on the Yogacaraphilosophy of "Mind-only" is often expressed in his discourses:

"Your mind is nirvana, you might think that you can find a Buddha or enlightenment somewhere beyond the mind, but such a place does not exist."

He also lectured extensively on the doctrine of emptiness (Shunyata), a defining feature of Mahayana thought found in the Prajnaparamita Sutras and the writings of Nagarjuna (c. 150-250) and his school of Madhyamaka. In one example, he states that "the sutras tell us... to see without seeing... to hear without hearing, to know without knowing... Basically, seeing, hearing, and knowing are completely empty". This passage expresses another distinct feature of Zen: we should act without conceptualization or (as a result) hesitation. All things and all actions are held to be "empty" of any intellectual elaborations, and exist freely



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and spontaneously as direct expressions of nothing other than themselves. This influence is seen in Zen's insistence on natural and immediate actions and responses, as seen in numerous koans, interactions between teachers and students, and in Zen art. One common example of this is a student shouting in response to a teacher's question as a way of demonstrating their understanding. If the student is able to do so without hesitation and with their whole being, then they are said to have shown their master their 'Zen Mind.'

Another characteristic feature of Bodhidharma's presentation of Buddhism was the emphasis he placed on physical well-being. He taught that keeping our bodies healthy increases our mental energy and prepares us for the rigors that serious meditation practice requires. Bodhidharma's mind-and-body approach to spiritual practice ultimately proved highly attractive to the Samurai class in Japan, who incorporated Zen into their way of life, following their encounter with the martial-arts-oriented Zen Rinzai School introduced to Japan by Eisai in the twelfth century.

Critical moments of life

In a fit of anger after repeatedly falling asleep while attempting to practice meditation in the monastery in Luoyang, he cut off his eyelids. (This is one reason why he was often portrayed in art with an intense wide-eyed stare.) Upon touching the ground, they sprung up as the first tea plant. The first two of these legends are like others that seem intended to offer instruction in religious truths or in the importance of concentration in religious practice. The third provided a folkloric basis for the traditional practice among Zen monks of drinking strong tea in order to stay awake during meditation. It also provided an account of the introduction of tea into East Asia

Writings / Celebrated books

- The Bloodstream Sermon
- The Breakthrough Sermon
- The Outline of Practice
- Two Entrances
- The Wake-Up Sermon

Location

Shaolin Temple, China.

Sources

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