

CHAN: Bodhidharma Coming from West

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Good morning!

The Buddha held the bright and wonderful lotus flower and Maha Kasyapa silently broke into a smile. The Chan Dharma was demonstrated and started just in that short and subtle moment.

From the flower sermon, we knew that the Chan Dharma started from Maha Kasyapa and he was the first Patriarch of Chan Dharma. From one generation to another, and after about 2000 years, the 27th Patriarch was Prajnatarā.

How did Chan Dharma was transmitted to Bodhidharma, the 28th Patriarch in India?

Bodhidharma was born in South India and he was the third son of Xiang Zhi King. He was the one chosen to be the King after his father.

One day, the King was possessed by one of his karmic creditors who wanted the King to die. At that time, the 27th Patriarch came and expounded Dharma to the King's karmic creditor and all the people there. The King's karmic creditor understood and left the King's body and the King was saved. The King was very grateful and sent one servant to offer Patriarch Prajnatarā a priceless jewel.

Patriarch Prajnatarā took a look at the jewel and asked Bodhidharma and his two brothers, "May I ask you, Your Highness, is there anything more valuable than this pearl in this world?" The first and second princes answered, "The pearl can light up everything in this world and no other treasure can be comparable with it. Only master has the virtue to possess this valuable pearl." The third prince, Bodhidharma, answered, "The light of the pearl only illuminates externally, not internally. So, I think the light of wisdom is the most

precious. The light of wisdom enables you to be intelligent and intelligent enough to differentiate right from wrong.”

Patriarch Prajnatarā then asked Bodhidharma, “Which thing is formless in the world?”

“Everything is formless if you don’t think of its form.”

“Which thing is the highest in the world?”

“Human being is the highest.”

“Which is the greatest?”

“The Dharma nature is the greatest”

Patriarch Prajnatarā nodded and did not say a word.

After Patriarch Prajnatarā left, Bodhidharma saw a scent bag. There was a note in it which said, “Who am I before I was born? Who am I after I was born?” Since then, this question had been hovering in his mind for months and he could not eat well or sleep well.

Few months later, the King died. With the question still bothering him, he went to meet Patriarch Prajnatarā and expressed his determination to become a Buddha. Patriarch Prajnatarā said, “If you really want to become a Buddha, go and build a practicing room first to show your determination.”

Without a word, Bodhidharma went out to try to build a practicing room. He cut branches, mixed the mud. After many tries, a thatch house finally was ready. However, at that moment, Bodhidharma suddenly realized what Patriarch Prajnatarā really meant about the practicing room. He pushed the thatch house down to the ground and said to Patriarch Prajnatarā, “Shifu, I am stupid and it took me so long to build this practicing room. It was not to build, actually, but to find. Dharma practicing is in the heart.”

With this understanding, Bodhidharma started to follow Patriarch Prajnatarā to practice diligently and served Patriarch Prajnatarā for 40 years. After Patriarch Prajnatarā passed away, Bodhidharma started to demonstrate and expound Dharma and transform people in India.

Later, in South India, there was a king who did not believe in Buddha Dharma. He said, "All my ancestors believed in Buddha Bodhi and they were stuck in deviated perception. They were short in both life span and luck. Furthermore, if my body is Buddha, why do I need to pursue externally? Karmic retribution is pretentious and fictional. For all my father's old ministers and Buddhist friends, I will abolish them all." After Bodhidharma heard this, he signed mournfully on the king. How to rescue him?

Bodhidharma sent one of his disciples, Poloti, to persuade the king.

The king asked Poloti, "Are you a good one or evil one?"

Poloti answered, "I am neither good nor evil. If Your Majesty's heart is righteous, then I am neither good nor evil."

The king was angry and asked, "What is Buddha?"

Poloti answered, "Seeing the nature is the Buddha."

The king asked, "Can Master see the self-nature?"

Poloti answered, "I can see the self-nature."

The king asked, "Where is the self-nature?"

Poloti answered, "The self-nature is functioning."

The king asked, "Where is it functioning? I don't see it."

Poloti said, "It's functioning right now. Your Majesty, you just cannot see it yourself."

“Do I have it?” “If Your Majesty functions, then you have it; If it’s not functioning, then you might not be able to see your body.”

The king asked, “When functioning, how many places does it appear at?”

Poloti said, “Eight places.”

The king said, “What are the eight places?”

Poloti answered, “It functions at the embryo and the embryo grows to be a body; it functions at living in the world and so the humans have many skills; it functions at the eyes and the eyes see; it functions at the ears and the ears hear; it functions at the nose and the nose smells; it functions at the mouth and the mouth talks; it functions at the hands and the hands hold and take; it functions at the feet and the feet run; it appears in all the worlds as many as the sands in Ganges River and it also appears in a small dust. People who know it say it is the Buddha nature and people who do not know say that it is the spirit.”

After the king heard this verse, he saw the self-nature and enlightened. He repented to Poloti. From then on, he always asked Buddhists about the Dharma essentials and cultivated the Buddha Bodhi days and nights. He died at 90 years old.

By following Patriarch Prajnataras words, Bodhidharma started his journey to China 67 years after Patriarch Prajnataras passed away. He was tossed in the sea over three years and arrived at China from the South Sea. It was the 7th year of Emperor Liangwu and Bodhidharma was welcomed to see the Emperor.

The emperor asked Bodhidharma, “After I succeeded the throne, I built many Buddhist temples; translated many sutras; made many people to leave their family and became monks. What merits do I have?”

Bodhidharma said, “You don’t have merits.”

The emperor asked, "Why don't I have merits?"

Bodhidharma answered, "These are just small fruits to be humans and heavenly beings, the cause of leakage. They are like the shadows. They exist, but not real." The Emperor then asked, "What is real merit?" Bodhidharma said, "Give without any attachment, no thinking of the giver, the acceptor, and the thing given, which is also called formless three wheels. Give while not thinking about merits. The mind is pure, wise, nondiscriminative and in a state of wonderfulness. The mind of giving rises without any attachment and the heart resides nowhere. Only in this state of consciousness, the merit obtained has no leakage and is the true merit."

The Emperor then asked, "What is the noble first Principle?"

Bodhidharma answered, "Everything is empty and there isn't the noble first Principle."

The Emperor then asked, "Who is this person answering my questions?"

Bodhidharma answered, "I don't know."

The Emperor did not understand. Bodhidharma knew that their minds did not meet, so he left quietly and came to the north shore of the Yangtse River.

Later, the Emperor realized that Bodhidharma was the enlightened Master. He sent people to run after him. Bodhidharma just arrived at the Yangtse River and saw the people chasing after him. He then broke off a reed and threw it into the river. The reed took Bodhidharma across the river. This is the famous story of "One Reed Across the River". After Bodhidharma crossed the Yangtse River, he traveled with a monk's cane in hand, pilgrimaging to the mountains and meditating in temples along the way. In the year of 527, he arrived at Song mountain. There, the forest was thick; mountains were beautiful; the environment was serene and the people there believed in Buddha. Bodhidharma found a cave and started to sit and meditate there. Facing the wall, he sit for nine years without eating or sleeping. This is another famous story of Bodhidharma, "Facing the Wall for Nine Years".

Everyone could guess what happened when people found this monk meditating all the time without eating or sleeping. So, Bodhidharma became famous. People heard his story and came to see him and some started to follow him. Bodhidharma became the first Patriarch of Chan Buddhism in China. Bodhidharma transmitted Chan Dharma to Huike together with *Lankavatara Sutra*. He said, "This sutra fits with Chinese people's root. If you can practice by following this sutra, then you will get out of the world."

It was said that there was a famous royal teacher in the palace and his name was Bodhiruci. He was so jealous of Bodhidharma and tried to poison him several times. He sent people to put poison into Bodhidharma's meal. Bodhidharma knew it but he still ate his meal. After he ate the meal, he would spit out a poisonous snake. Until one day, when he had already transmitted Chan Dharma to Huike, he decided to enter Nirvana. So, he ate the last poisonous meal.

After Bodhidharma died, his disciples buried him within a coffin.

One day, an envoy, Song Yun, who went to the Western regions from the Northern Wei Dynasty met Patriarch Bodhidharma at Cong Ling. He asked Bodhidharma, "Master, who did you transmit the Dharma to?"

Patriarch Bodhidharma answered, "You will know after you go back. I am going back to India." He then took off one shoe and gave it to Song Yun and said, "Go back quickly. Your King will die today."

After coming back, Song Yun talked about this thing and he did not believe that Patriarch Bodhidharma was dead already. So, people opened the coffin and found that there was only one shoe inside.

According to historical records, after Patriarch Bodhidharma transmitted Dharma to Huike, he went to Ding Lin temple and expounded Dharma there for five years. It's said that Patriarch Bodhidharma passed away at 150 years old.

“Bodhidharma came from the west without one word;
All efforts came from the mind;
If you want to look for Buddha Dharma on paper;
Then ink as much as the Dong Ting lake would be used up.”
This is the story of how Patriarch brought Chan Dharma to China.

There are some koans you may find online, which is interesting to think about and understand Chan.

a monk asked, “What does it mean, ‘Bodhidharma came from the west’?”

Chao-chou said, “The oak tree in the front yard.”

A monk asked, “What is the message of Bodhidharma who came from the west?”

The Master descended from his seat and stood there.

A monk asked, “What is the meaning of the Patriarch’s coming from the West?”

The Master said, “Sitting for a long time becomes tiresome.”

This is all for today.

“I came to this land

to transmit Dharma and transform deluded living beings.

One flower blooms and five petals grow,

and fruition will come and there is no doubt about it.”

Next week, we will talk about the “Breaking One Arm to Pursue the Dharma.” We will talk about how Chan Dharma was transmitted to Huike, the 2ed Patriarch.

Thank you for listening!