

Chan Buddhism



The Second Patriarch in Contemplation, Shi ke, Tang Dynasty, 10th c.

Dazu Huike

THE LIFE of the Second Ancestor, Huike, is also obscured by the currents of time. According to traditional sources he was born in the year 487 to a family with the surname Ji in the city of Hulao, Henan Province. He grew to be an imposing-looking individual, with five bumps ("five peaks") upon his head. According to the lamp records, Huike entered

monastic life at the Dragon Gate Temple on Fragrant Mountain in Luoyang. There he studied under a Zen master named Baojing ("Precious Peace").

Huike met Bodhidharma and studied with him at Shaolin Temple on Mt. Song for six years. Huike is remembered and extolled in Zen tradition for his determination to realize the great truth of the Zen school. According to legend, Huike stood waiting in the snow outside Bodhidharma's cave, then cut off his left arm to show his sincerity. Recognizing Huike's great resolve, Bodhidharma accepted him as his student. Huike said to Bodhidharma, "My mind is anxious. Please pacify it." To which Bodhidharma replied, "Bring me your mind, and I will pacify it." Huike said, "Although I've sought it, I cannot find it." Bodhidharma then said, "There, I have pacified your mind."

After Bodhidharma's death, Huike traveled to the capital city, Yedu, in the kingdom of Wei. He remained there, except for a period of political turmoil, for the next forty years, upholding and expounding the practice of his teacher. However, religious rivalry and government persecution embroiled Huike in the upheavals of his era. At some time during this period he sought refuge in the mountains. According to tradition, he met and transmitted the lineage of Bodhidharma to his disciple and Dharma heir Sengcan on Huangong Mountain during this period. In the year 579, when political conditions improved, Huike returned to Yedu.

According to the *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, a historical record written in the seventh century, Huike had several prominent disciples and lay students. The lamp records offer a traditional account of Huike's life.

From the *Transmission of the Lamp*

Residing at Shaolin Temple of Sung Mountain, Master Bodhidharma sat [in meditation] facing the wall all day long in silence. People wondered who he was and called him the Wall-Gazing Brahmin.

At that time there was a Buddhist monk named Shénguāng who was widely informed and who had been living in Loyang for a long time. He read [great] quantities of all kinds of books which told of the profound Principle. He sighed and said, "The teachings of Confucius and Laozi are but customs and etiquette, and the books of *Zhuangzi* and the *Yi Jing* still do not plumb the depths of the wonderful Principle. Lately I hear that Master Dharma is living in Shaolin Temple. With this supreme man so near, I should reach the deeper realms [of understanding]." Then he went to him, wanting to be instructed from morning till night. The Master, however, would give him no instruction, but sat in meditation all the time facing the wall.

Guāng thought to himself: "Men of old sought the Way by smashing their bones to take out the marrow, slashing their veins to feed hungry [animals], spreading their hair to cover the muddy road in order to let a spiritual man pass through safely, or leaping off a cliff to feed a hungry tigress. All through the ages people have behaved like this. Who am I [not to do so]?"

On December 9th of that year it snowed heavily in the night. Shénguāng stood firmly without moving [in the yard of Shaolin Temple]. By dawn of the next day, the falling snow had piled so deep that it reached his knees.

Master Bodhidharma then took pity on him and asked him, "What are you seeking, standing in the snow for this long time?"

Shénguāng sobbed, and in tears begged him, "Please, Master, have mercy. Open the gate of nectar. Deliver the message that liberates sentient beings!"

The master said, "The supreme, unequalled, spiritual Way of the buddhas is accessible only after vast eons of striving to overcome the impossible and to bear the unbearable. How could a man of small virtue, little wisdom, slight interest, and slow mind attain the True Vehicle? Striving for it would be vain effort."

After listening to this exhortation from the master, Shen-kuang secretly took a sharp knife and cut off his own left arm, placing it in front of the master.

Realizing that he was a good vessel for the dharma, the master said, "All buddhas in search of the Way have begun by ignoring their bodies for the sake of the Dharma. Now you have cut off your arm in front of me. You may have the right disposition."

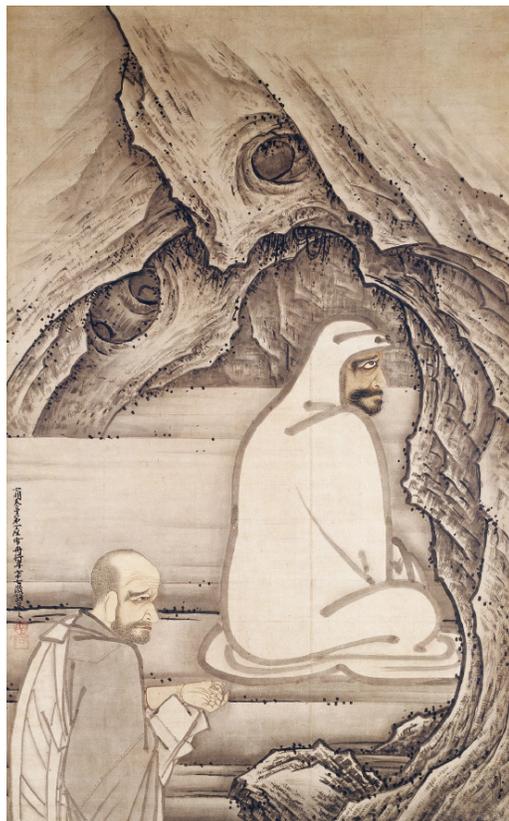
The master then renamed him Huike. Huike asked, "May I hear about the Dharma-seal of the Buddha?"

The master said, "The Dharma-seal is not something that can be heard about from others."

Huike said, "My mind is not yet at peace. Pray set it at peace for me, Master!"

The master said, "Bring me your mind, and I will set it at peace for you." Huike answered, "I have searched for it, but in the end it is unobtainable." The master said, "Your mind has been set at peace."

Later on, Emperor Hsiao-ming heard about the marvellous deeds of the master. He dispatched a messenger with an imperial invitation to the palace. Three times in all the imperial messenger came to urge him [to accept the invitation], but the master would not come down from the mountain. The emperor's warm respect for the master increased more and more, and he sent gifts of two linen robes, a golden bowl, a silver pitcher, silken cloth, and other



Eka Danpi (Eka cutting off his elbow).
Hanging scroll, 1498. By Sesshū (1420-1506).

articles. Three times the master firmly refused them, which only confirmed still more the wish of the emperor. At last the master accepted them. From this time the devotion of his congregation, robed and lay, increased more and more.

After nine years had passed, the master wished to return to the western land of India. He said to his disciples, "The time has come [for me to go back home]. I want each of you to show your understanding."

One disciple, Daofu, answered, "According to what I understand, the function of the Dao cannot be grasped through literal knowledge, nor is it 'apart from literal knowledge.'"

The master remarked, "You have gained my skin!"

A nun, Zongzhi, said, "What I understand now is like Ananda's glimpse of the realm of Akshobhya Buddha. It may be seen in oneness, but never in duality."

The master said, "You have gained my flesh!"

Daoyu said, "The four great [elements] are originally empty, the five aggregates (physical form, sensation, perception, impulse, and thought) do not exist, and in my comprehension there is not a single thing to be found."

The master declared, "You have gained my bone!" Finally Huike bowed and remained standing at his seat. The master said, "You have gained my marrow!"

Looking at Huike, the master told him, "In days gone by, the Tathagata handed on to Mahakashyapa the true Dharma-eye. Through the Ancestors, from one to another, it then came into my hands. Now I am giving it to you, and you must take good care of it. Besides this, I will give you my yellow robe, which shall be the testimony of faith in the Dharma. Each has a significance which you should know."

Huike said, "Will you please reveal to me the significance?"

The master said, "By carrying the Dharma-seal you will be inwardly in accord with the approved mind, and the keeping of the robe will fix the outward spiritual message. In later generations, when mutual trust is slight and doubts arise, people may say, 'He was a man of India and you are a son of this land—how could the Dharma be transmitted? What proof is there?' Now that you are receiving the robe and the dharma, they can be produced as proof, and the activity of the message will be freed from obstacles.

"After two hundred years it will be time to stop transmitting the robe. Then the Dharma will be spread all over the world. But although many people will know of the Tao, few will practice *it*; and although there will be many who preach the Principle, few will penetrate it. More than a thousand, or ten thousand, people will concur with the innermost [teaching] and bear private witness. When you expound the truth, do not slight the man who is not yet enlightened. Should his essential nature suddenly turn, he would be equal in original enlightenment. Listen to my poem:

*Originally I came to this land
To rescue deluded people by transmitting the Dharma.
One flower will open with five petals
And the fruit will ripen by itself.*

This selection is adapted from:

The Roaring Stream: A New Zen Reader, Nelson Foster and Jack Shoemaker, eds. (Hopewell, New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1996).

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From the *Compendium of Five Lamps*

Huike was the Second Ancestor of Zen in China. He came from Hulao and his surname was Ji. His father's name was Jiji.

Before he had children, Huike's father thought, "Our house pays reverence to what is good. How can we not have children?"

They often prayed to Buddha. One night they observed an unnatural light pervade their house, and as a result of this Ji's wife became pregnant. Because of this omen, when the child grew up he was given the name "Light." As a young man, Huike showed uncommon conviction. He was very skilled at poetry but was uninterested in household affairs, preferring to roam among mountains and rivers. Later, when he read the Buddhist sutras, he excelled in his understanding. He then went to Dragon Gate Monastery on Fragrant Mountain in Luoyang, where he began study under Zen master Baojing. He received ordination at Yongmu Temple. He then traveled to various seats of learning for the Buddhadharma, studying the teachings of the Mahayana and Hinayana. At the age of thirty-two, he returned to Fragrant Mountain. There he practiced meditation throughout the day.

Once, while he sat in silent stillness, an apparition appeared to Huike and said, "If you want to be successful, then why are you remaining here? The great way is not far away. Go south!"

Huike then told his teacher about the apparition. His teacher observed Huike's head and saw that there were seven bumps on it that stuck up like small peaks.

His teacher said, "You have seen an auspicious omen. The evidence is here on your head. The apparition said that you should go south. This means that you should study with Bodhidharma at Shaolin Temple."

Huike accepted this instruction and set off for Shaolin.

When Bodhidharma completed the transmission of his Dharma to Huike, Bodhidharma returned to India. Huike then strongly expounded Bodhidharma's teaching and looked far and wide for a Dharma successor.

In the second year of the Tianping era of the Northern Qi dynasty [536], a layman whose name is not known came to Huike and said, "My body has been wracked by a terrible illness. I ask that you help me absolve the transgression I've committed that has caused this."

Huike said, "Bring to me the transgression you've committed and I'll absolve it."

The layman said, "I look for the transgression but I can't find it."

Huike said, "There, I've absolved your transgression. Now you should abide in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha."

The layman said, "Seeing you here, I know what is meant by 'Sangha,' but I still don't know what are called Buddha and Dharma."

Huike said, "Mind is Buddha. Mind is Dharma. Buddha and Dharma are not two different things. Along with Sangha they comprise the three jewels." The layman said, "Today, for the first time, I realize that my transgression was not internal, was not external, and was not in between these two states. It was entirely within mind. Buddha and Dharma are not two things."

Huike recognized the layman to be a great Dharma vessel. He received him as a student and shaved his head, saying, "You are a great jewel. I give you the name Sengcan ['Gem Monk']."

On the eighteenth day of the third lunar month of that year, Sengcan underwent ordination. From that time on his illness gradually subsided.

Sengcan spent two years acting as Huike's attendant. Then Huike said to him,

"Bodhidharma came from India and transmitted to me the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, along with the robe of the ancestral transmission. I now pass it to you. Uphold and sustain it, and don't allow the lineage to be cut off. Listen to this verse of mine:

*Fundamentally, karmic conditions have given rise to the ground
That allows the seeds of flowers to grow.
Fundamentally, nothing has been planted,
And flowers have not grown.*

After transmitting Bodhidharma's Dharma and robe to Sengcan, Huike said to him, "You have received my teaching, and now you should live deep in the mountains. Don't circulate in the world, for the country will have a great calamity."

Sengcan said, "Since you know about this calamity in advance, please instruct me about it."

Huike said, "I have no foreknowledge about this. It is a prediction made by [the twenty-seventh Zen ancestor in India] Prajnadhara and transmitted to China by Bodhidharma, wherein he said, 'While it will be auspicious to abide in mind, outside of this there will be evil.' I have studied these times and see that [this calamity] may befall you. Consider the truth of this prediction and don't be ensnared by the world's turmoil. As for me, I have karmic retribution to suffer. You should go and practice what is good. Wait for the time when you can transmit the Dharma to someone else."

After Huike instructed Sengcan in this manner, Huike went to Yedu and expounded the Dharma. His teaching spread widely, and as a result a great number of people from all directions entered monastic life. He continued in this manner for thirty-four years, but then concealed himself and changed his appearance. Sometimes he would go to wine houses, sometimes to butcher shops, and sometimes he would mingle in the bustling lanes of the city. He also was found among the ranks of household servants.

Some people asked him, "The master is a person of the Way. Why is he acting in this manner?"

But Huike answered them, saying, "I have rectified my mind. Of what concern is this to you?"

On one occasion, Huike expounded the unsurpassed Dharma to a large crowd before the front gate of Kuangqiu Temple in Guangcheng County. At the same time, the Dharma master Bianhe was lecturing on the Nirvana Sutra inside of the temple. As the congregation inside of the temple became aware of Huike's Dharma talk outside, they gradually were drawn outside to listen to him. Bianhe was unable to control his anger, and slandered Huike to the city magistrate, who was named Di Zhongkan. Di was confused by Bianhe's slanderous report and charged Huike with a crime. Huike [facing execution because of this criminal charge] remained calmly composed. Those who understand the truth said this episode was the "payment of a debt." The master lived to the age of one hundred and seven. Huike died on the sixteenth day of the third month in the thirteenth year of the Kaihuang era during the reign of Sui Wendi [594]. He was buried seventy *li* [forty-two kilometers] northeast of Fuyang in Ci Province." Later, the Tang dynasty emperor De Zong gave Huike the posthumous name "Dazu" ["Great Ancestor"]

([Later,] a Buddhist patron named Haoyue asked Zen master Changsha Jingcen, "An old worthy said that 'karmic obstacles are fundamentally empty.' I don't understand why, when this is realized, there is still a 'karmic debt' that must be repaid. For example, in the case of the

esteemed Second Ancestor, why did he have to repay a karmic debt?" Zen master Changsha replied, "Your Worthiness doesn't understand fundamental emptiness." Haoyue said, "What is fundamental emptiness?" Changsha said, "Karmic obstruction." Haoyue said, "What is karmic obstruction?" Changsha said, "Fundamental emptiness." Haoyue was silent. Changsha then recited a verse:

*If something is fundamental, it doesn't exist.
If something is annihilated, it doesn't cease.
Nirvana and karmic retribution
Are of one inseparable nature.*

Zen's Chinese Heritage: The Masters and Their Teachings, Andy Ferguson (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2011).