



Figure 1. Hakuin Ekaku (1684–1768), *Bodhidharma*

Pointing directly to the human mind,
See your own nature and become Buddha.

Bodhidharma (died c. 532)

The Two Paths (complete)

The semi-legendary figure Bodhidharma (Japanese: Daruma) is considered both the twenty-eighth generation from the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, and the founder of East Asian Zen. He is therefore the First Zen Patriarch, and later Masters count their generations from him. Because accounts of Bodhidharma's life and teachings were generally written some time after his life, they are historically questionable; a few scholars have even wondered if he existed at all. Nevertheless, Bodhidharma has been of supreme importance in the Zen tradition and is the subject most often depicted in Zen painting, where he represents meditation itself.

According to later accounts, Bodhidharma was the third son of a monarch from South India; he became a Buddhist monk, and traveled to southern China sometime after the year 500 C.E. He was welcomed by the Emperor Wu-ti of the Liang Dynasty, who told him of the many good works he had done, such as building temples. But when the Emperor asked how much merit he had acquired, Bodhidharma said "None."

"What is the first principle of sacred truth?"

"Vast emptiness, nothing sacred."

"Who then is facing me?"

"Don't know."

The Emperor was perplexed, and Bodhidharma departed northward to cross the Yangtze River (supposedly on a reed but more likely on a reed raft), and meditated in front of a wall near the Shao-lin temple for nine years, his famous "wall-gazing" of extraordinary meditation. At this point a Chinese monk named Hui-k'o asked for his guidance, but Bodhidharma was so intent on meditation that he did not notice until the monk cut off one of his arms to show his serious intent. This decisive action is seen as a metaphor for the commitment needed to study Zen. The story of Bodhidharma's subsequent teaching to Hui-k'o became Case Forty-One of the Wu-men-kuan (Japanese:

Mumonkan; see Chapter 12), a collection of Zen anecdotes and encounters that are given as meditation questions to monks in training.

Although probably dating to a later century, Bodhidharma's most famous teaching is regarded as the essential statement on Zen, with the understanding that in Chinese and Japanese, the character here translated as "mind" also means "heart" and could be translated either way.

Without relying on words and writings,
A special transmission outside the scriptures;
Pointing directly to the human mind,
See your own nature and become Buddha.

A story of Bodhidharma's understanding of his four leading followers, although recorded several hundred years later, tells us more about his teaching.

After nine years of teaching, Bodhidharma wished to return to the West [India] and asked his pupils what they had attained from his teaching. Tao-fu said, "In my understanding, the truth neither holds onto words and writings nor is separate from them, yet they can help to realize the Way." The Master replied, "You have attained my skin."

Next the nun Tsung-chih said, "In my understanding, the truth is like a fortunate glimpse of the Eastern Paradise of Akshobya; it can be seen one time and not again." The Master replied, "You have attained my flesh."

Tao-yu then said, "The four elements are originally empty, and the five aspects of personality are nonexistent. In my understanding, there is no teaching to be grasped." The Master replied, "You have attained my bones."

Hui-k'o bowed respectfully and remained silent. The Master said, "You have attained my marrow."

Hui-k'o was then given the transmission as Second Patriarch, and East Asian Zen was firmly established as a continuing tradition.

Several short sermon texts are also attributed to Bodhidharma, one of which teaches two methods of Zen practice.

The Two Paths

Many paths enter the Way, but they do not go beyond two basic kinds. The first is entering through principle, and the second is through practice. To enter through principle means using teachings to awaken the essence and understanding that all beings have the same true nature, which does not shine clearly because it is covered with the dust of delusion. When you abandon the false to cherish the real and meditate in front of a wall, you will discover that there is no separation between self and other; ordinary people and sages are the same. Not bound by words, free from concepts and discriminations, you will be completely in accord with inner truth. This is called entering through principle.

To enter through practice means the four practices that include all others. What are these four? The first is making amends for injustices. The second is accepting worldly conditions. The third is not craving. The fourth is practicing the Dharma.

What is the practice of making amends for injustices? When struggling with difficulties, the person who cultivates the Way should think, "In countless past ages I have deserted the root and followed the branches through a multitude of existences, giving in to feelings of anger and hatred, creating limitless transgressions. Even if I lead a blameless life, the evil deeds of the past have ripened, so any sufferings I feel now are not to be blamed on gods or other humans." You should accept any difficulties that life brings without complaint, for the sutras say, "When you meet with adversity there is no need to be upset, because from a higher viewpoint the basic cause can be understood." If you can keep this attitude in mind, you will be in harmony with truth, and you can make the experience of adversity into practice to enter the Way. This is called making amends for injustice.

What is the practice of accepting worldly conditions? We sentient beings have no true selves but experience happiness and suffering depending upon conditions stemming from cause and effect. If I find fame and fortune, that is the outcome of deeds from the past—but when conditions change, they will disappear, so why be exultant? Gain and loss come from conditions, but Mind neither increases nor decreases. If you are not stirred by the winds of joy or sorrow, you are in silent accord with the Way. This is called accepting worldly conditions.

What is the practice of not craving? People in this world are always seeking one thing or another outside themselves, which is called craving. But those who are wise wake up and maintain the serenity of inner truth while their bodies change with the seasons and laws of causation. All things are empty, so there is nothing to seek and crave. The sutras tell us that seeking

leads to suffering, and happiness comes when we cease craving, so we can know that seeking nothing is the Way. This is called not craving.

Finally, what is practicing the Dharma? The Dharma teaches that all natures are inherently pure, and the truth of all manifestations is emptiness. There is no impurity, no attachment, no self, and no other. The sutras say, “In Dharma there are no sentient beings, because it is detached from any impurity of sentient beings; in Dharma there is no self, because it is free from any impurities of selfhood.” When the wise understand this truth, they practice the Dharma. Since they have no desire to possess, they practice charity with their bodies, lives, and property without grudging, without partiality, and without attachment to giving. They merely benefit other sentient beings and follow the Way without grasping at forms. As with charity, they also practice the other virtues in order to eliminate delusions, but without being conscious of being virtuous. This is called practicing the Dharma.

—Translation by Stephen Addiss