

A Woman's Koan

When I first heard about Prajnatarā, Bodhidharma's master, being a woman, I spoke with Rev. Hubert Nearman about it. He told me that not only did it resonate as true with him (He changed Prajnatarā's gender to female in his Shobogenzo translation) but when he was translating the Denkoroku he suspected that the third Chinese ancestor, Kanchi Sosan (Seng-ts'an), was also a woman. This was partially due to the way the Chinese was written but also to the spiritual question (koan) of the person in the story.

To paraphrase the story in light of the above:

Bear in mind that one of Bodhidharma's Dharma heirs, as well as his Teacher, were women.

Bodhidharma's disciple Eka was giving a Dharma talk when a lay woman in the assembly suddenly came forward, bowed and said to him, "I have a fundamental flaw, impediment. Can you help me to get rid of it?"

Eka replied, "Bring it out and show it to me and I will help you."

The laywoman replied, "I have searched for the real nature of it for all of my life but I have been unable to find it."

Eka replied, "There, I have helped you with it!"

"A little girl of seven even may be the teacher of the four classes of Buddhists and the mother of True Compassion to all living things. One of the greatest teachings of Buddhism is its insistence upon the complete equality of the sexes."

Dogen

Gassho,

Koten