

The Old Woman's Enlightenment

Japan, 18th c.

An old woman went to hear Master Hakuin give a lecture. He said, "Your mind is the Pure Land, and your body is Amida Buddha. When Amida Buddha appears, mountains, rivers, forests, and fields all radiate a great light. If you want to understand, look into your own heart."

The old woman pondered Hakuin's words day and night, waking and sleeping. One day, as she was washing a pot after breakfast, a great light flashed through her mind. She dropped the pot and ran to tell Hakuin. "Amida Buddha filled my whole body. Mountains, rivers, forests, and fields are all shining with light. How wonderful!" She danced for joy.

"What are you talking about?" Hakuin asked. "Does the light shine up your asshole?"

Small as she was, she gave him a big push, saying, "I can see you're not enlightened yet!" They both burst out laughing.

The Old Woman Steals Zhaozhou's Bamboo Shoots

China, 9th c.

One day Master Zhaozhou Congshen was outside the monastery and an old woman came along carrying a basket. He asked her, "Where are you going?"

The old woman said, "I'm going to steal Zhaozhou's bamboo shoots."

Zhaozhou asked, "What will you do if you run into Zhaozhou?"

The old woman walked up to Zhaozhou and slapped him.

The Old Woman's Relatives

China, 9th c.

Once a monk on pilgrimage met an old woman living alone in a hut. The monk asked, "Do you have any relatives?"

She said, "Yes."

The monk asked, "Where are they?"

She answered, "The mountains, rivers, and the whole earth, the plants and trees, are all my relatives."

The Old Woman Recognizes Mazu

China, 8th c.

When Master Mazu Daoyi returned to his native place for a short visit, he was warmly welcomed by his countrymen.

But an old woman, who used to be his next-door neighbor, said, "I thought that all the commotion was caused by the visit of some extraordinary personage. In fact, it's none other than that little chap who is the son of Ma, the garbage collector."

On hearing this, Mazu improvised the following poem:

I advise you not to return to your native place
for no one can be a sage in his own home.
This old woman by the side of the brook
still calls me the garbage man's son!

The Old Woman's Rice Cakes

China, 9th c.

Deshan Xuanjian was a great scholar of the *Diamond Sutra*, but he was not a Chan practitioner. He was traveling south in search of the Dharma, carrying his commentaries on the *Diamond Sutra* with him. In the course of his travels he came across an old woman on the roadside selling tea and rice cakes. He asked her, "Who are you?"

She responded, "I am an old woman selling rice cakes." When he asked if he could buy some refreshments from her, she inquired, "Venerable priest, what are you carrying in your bag?"

He said, "I am a scholar of the *Diamond Sutra*, and here I have all my notes and commentaries."

Hearing this, the old woman said, "I have heard that, according to the *Diamond Sutra*, past mind is ungraspable, present mind is ungraspable, and future mind is ungraspable. So where is the mind that you wish to refresh with rice cakes, oh scholar? If you can answer this, you may buy a rice cake from me. If not, you'll have to go elsewhere for refreshment."

Deshan was unable to reply. The old woman then directed him to a Chan master nearby.

Deshan burned all his notes and commentaries the next day.