

BODHIDHARMA'S ZEN
(published September 1962, Wind Bell #10)

The Emperor Wu built many temples, translated many scriptures, and encouraged many men and women to believe in the monastic life. The Emperor thought he would attain Nirvana as a result of these works he considered meritorious.

When Bodhidharma came to the Emperor's land, the Emperor asked, "What is the Holy reality?"

Bodhidharma answered, "Emptiness, no Holiness."

The Emperor asked again, "Who are you then?"

Bodhidharma said, "Something intangible (Holy reality)."

True merit is the result of pure and whole practice of Zen. Holy reality is not the result of works of merit. Because the Emperor's attitude toward reality and merit was the opposite of Bodhidharma's, he could not respond to Bodhidharma's statement.

After the interview with the Emperor, Bodhidharma crossed the river to the state of Wei, but in reality he did not leave the Emperor. The Emperor is not always with us, but Bodhidharma is always in this place. Thus all the schools of Zen originate from Bodhidharma's Zen.

If the Emperor's view of merit were correct, for whom would there be Holy reality?

What is pure and whole practice?
