

## Won Hyo's Enlightenment

Thirteen hundred years ago, in an ancient province of Korea, there was a great Zen Master named Won Hyo. As a young man he fought in a bloody civil war and saw many friends slaughtered and homes destroyed. He was overcome by the emptiness of this life, so he shaved his head and went to the mountains to live the life of a monk.

In the mountains he read many Sutras and kept his precepts well, but still he didn't understand the true meaning of Buddhism. Finally, since he knew that in China he might find a Zen master who could help him become enlightened, he put on his backpack and headed for the great dry Northern plains.

He went on foot. He would walk all day long and rest at night. One evening, after months of walking, he stopped at a small patch of green, where there were a few trees and some water and went to sleep. Toward midnight he woke up very thirsty. It was pitch dark. He groped along on all fours searching for water. At last his hand touched a cup on the ground. He picked it up and drank. Ah, how delicious! Then he bowed deeply in gratitude to Buddha for the gift of water.



The next morning he woke up and saw beside him what he had taken for a cup. It was a shattered skull, blood-caked and still with shreds of flesh stuck to the cheekbones. Strange insects crawled or floated on the surface of the filthy rain water inside it. Won Hyo looked at the skull and felt a great wave of nausea. He opened his mouth. As soon as the vomit poured out, his mind opened and he understood. Last night, since he hadn't seen and hadn't thought, the water was delicious. This morning, seeing and thinking had made him vomit. Ah, he said to himself, thinking makes good and bad, life and death. It creates the whole universe. It is the universal master. And without thinking, there is no universe, no Buddha, no Dharma. All is one, and this one is empty.

There was no need now to find a master. Won-Hyo already understood life and death. What more was there to learn? So he turned and started back across the desert to Korea.