What it means to be a Black Belt

Earning a Black Belt is a long journey. My journey started when I was four years old. As a kid when I began I wasn't that serious about Karate. That all changed one day when I went to a Saturday class. I think I was at about a yellow belt. I was doing a drill but I was really excited and I was goofing around. Then Sensei decided to take away one of my karate bucks. This made me to focus and pay more attention in class. Later in my training I was sparring. In the middle of the match I took a front kick to the solar plexus, and I got the wind knocked out of me. From then onward I have learned to better control the spacing when I am sparring.

Around blue belt there was an inner dojo kata tournament. I put so much effort in developing my kata, Gojushiho-sho, for the tournament and learned many things from the effort put into practicing. One of the things that I learned was that the through the practice of my kata I improved my stances quality and the breathing. These things that I learned I applied to my other katas and I know that elevated them to the next level.

These are some of the important lessons I have learned that has helped me progress to this point. The Black Belt isn't just a belt that marks an accomplishment. If I just put on the Black Belt it doesn't magically make me great at Karate. It's the journey I took to earn a Black Belt that really counts. The belt that symbolizes the lessons I've learned, the values that the character traits have given to me, and the physical and mental endurance that I've gained during the journey. Those are what will make me into a Black Belt. Having Black Belt as a goal pushed me to strive for it. Once accomplished I will continue my journey. Black Belt is my first accomplishment, but there is so much more to
accomplish and so many more lessons to learn. This isn't the end to my martial arts journey.

Upon reaching this goal I must be a good role model and must realize that people will see me differently when I wear this belt. I want the other students to think of me as an example and not a Black Belt that never gives them opportunities to learn. I want them to think of me as a teacher that can help them learn and grow.

In my martial arts future, I would like to study more in depth the other martial arts, like Taekwondo, Judo, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and many more. I want to keep going with Karate as usual and earn higher Black Belt degrees. I would also like to share my learnings through teaching other kids.

The countless other experiences, both good and bad, has made my karate better. A journey has its ups and down but they're all still experiences that when you can see the bright side of, you can learn from them. Over all what I think it means to me to be a Black Belt is the ups and downs of my journey that built me up to be worthy of a Black Belt.
Bodhidharma
The Father of Martial Arts
Table of Contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................ 2
2. Early Life ............................................................................................................... 3
3. Journey ................................................................................................................ 5
4. A Teacher is Discovered .................................................................................... 6
5. Martial Arts is Born .......................................................................................... 7
6. Kung Fu to Karate ................................................................................................ 9
7. Legacy .................................................................................................................. 12
8. Details about Bharatanatyam and Kalaripayattu .............................................. 13
9. Bodhidharma’s Influence .................................................................................... 15
10. Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 16
11. Bibliography ....................................................................................................... 17
1. Introduction

This project is a study of Bodhidharma’s life and his unique role in providing the building blocks for many martial arts including Karate. I chose Bodhidharma because he is believed to be from Kanchipuram, which is close to the city of Chennai where my family still lives now. I first learned about him in the year 2011 when I watched a movie about him called “7 aum Arivu” (Seventh Sense). The movie demonstrated some of his techniques and power. A book called “Stories from Chinese Literature” written by a professor from Tokyo University also inspired me. Finally, I chose him was because he was at the bottom of the lineage scroll at our Dojo. The lineage scroll shows the Martial Arts family tree for our style of Karate. He was considered the base of Karate and several other major martial arts. In addition to being a martial artist, Bodhidharma was an Indian monk and also was a medicinist. In this report I will take you through Bodhidharma’s early life, travel and some of his contributions to martial arts.
2. Early life

There are many versions of the early life of Bodhidharma and even his birthplace. According to Tsutomu Kambe, a professor of Tokyo University, in his book “Stories from Chinese Literature”, he discusses Bodhidharma and states:

"Bodhidharma was born as the third son of a South Indian King according to Chinese historical documents. It is speculated that the kingdom was Pallava, its capital city being Kanchipuram (pronounced as Kan-Zhi) near Chennai. He was named Bodhitara and his surname was Shatriya (the class of kings and warriors)." In some parts of China he was also known as Da Mo.
Bodhidharma was very intelligent and was the favorite son of the king. Bodhidharma had two older brothers who feared that their father, the king, would pass over the kingship to Bodhidharma. In their jealousy, the two older brothers often tried to find fault in Bodhidharma while talking with their father, hoping to turn him against their younger brother. The older brothers also attempted to assassinate Bodhidharma but Bodhidharma had very good karma and so the attempts were not successful. Despite being the favorite son of the king, Bodhidharma realized that he was not interested in the life of politics. He chose instead to study Buddhism from his teacher, Master Prajnatara, in order to become a Buddhist monk.
3. Journey

Bodhidharma trained with his master for many years. One day he asked his master, "Master, when you pass away, where should I go?" His master replied that he should go to Zhen Dan, which was the name for China at that time. A few years later, his master passed away and Bodhidharma got ready to go to China. No one is exactly sure why his teacher sent him to China. Some believe that he was sent to spread Buddhism through China. It took him three years to travel to China. During his journey, he experienced bad weather, dense mountains, jungle, and rivers. Some people even believed that he had the ability to cross the rapids using only one reed.
4. A Teacher is discovered

The king of the Pallava dynasty sent letters by carrier pigeons to the people of China instructed them to take care of Bodhidharma. The king sent the letters because Bodhidharma was his favorite son and he wanted him to be safe. Although he didn’t send people to go looking for him because he knew this is what Bodhidharma wanted to do and didn’t want to stop Bodhidharma’s dream.

While Bodhidharma was traveling he crossed many villages and towns on the way. He stopped at those towns to take rest and also meditate. Word got out about a Buddhist monk who was traveling from India. He was considered a master of Buddhism. Many people would ask him if he would teach them the way of Buddhism and meditation. He would either reject them or not answer which sometimes made people angry and discouraged. Sometimes when he felt his time there was over he would just stand up and walk away in the middle of his meditation, which made people upset to see him leave.

Bodhidharma continued his journey. Soon the news about the Buddhist monk got to the Emperor of China. Emperor Wu Dai decided to invite him to his palace. Bodhidharma accepted the invitation and changed his path to go to the Emperor’s palace. When Bodhidharma arrived there the Emperor showed Bodhidharma around his palace. The Emperor talked a lot about Buddhism. The fact that he kept talking about what he did to Buddhism made Bodhidharma disagree with some things the Emperor said. That enraged the Emperor and he banished Bodhidharma from his palace and said to never return.
5. Martial Arts is Born

Bodhidharma left and made his way to the Shaolin temple. Some believe that the master inspired him to go to the Shaolin temple. Once he reached the temple he immediately found a cave and meditated facing a wall for nine years. When his meditation time was over he was invited into the temple. Bodhidharma tried to teach them meditation but he soon realized that they lacked the focus and the stamina. The monks were very weak and tend to fall asleep during meditation. So Bodhidharma taught the monks an Indian exercise that he learned when he was the prince in India that taught them of self-discipline, toughness and focus. It was called the “Eighteen Lohan Hands.”

The “Eighteen Lohan Hands” was one of the influences that started Kung Fu. The “Eighteen Hands” was named after the Lohans. Lohans are the people who learned directly from Buddha. There were over five hundred Lohans but Bodhidharma chose eighteen to honor them. The “Eighteen Hands” is a fundamental Chi Kung exercise, which can bring amazing benefits. Some say it can even cure illnesses if used correctly. Now a days, when people do these exercises they do it as a physical exercise so they only get the physical benefits. After many years at the Shaolin temple the “Eighteen Hands” evolved in to a Kung Fu exercise called the “Eighteen Fists”. Through my research, I have come to believe our Karate horse stances likely came from Kung Fu. Some of our kata’s like Unso were also based on Kung Fu.
18 Lohan Hands

Along with the "Eighteen Fists" taught by Bodhidharma, there were several other influences that began Kung Fu. Some stances and actions in Kung Fu were from an Indian dance called Bharatanatyam and also an Indian martial arts called Kalaripayattu. Bodhidharma spent a lot of time observing Bharatanatyam in his time as a prince and brought it over to China. Bharatanatyam is a classical dance that is practiced by many people over the world; it is also one of the oldest dances in India. Kalaripayattu is an ancient martial art that was practiced in India. It includes weapons, grappling, strikes, and kicks. Kalaripayattu requires great flexibility and utilizes several animal stances. It is speculated that Bodhidharma might have brought over a little bit of Bharatanatyam and Kalaripayattu which influenced the beginnings of Chinese Kung Fu.
6. Kung Fu to Karate

The Shaolin monks practiced Bodhidharma’s exercises and his Buddhist (Zen) ways and were known as the most formidable fighters in China. In the late 12th Century, Japanese samurais were greatly influenced by Chinese Zen Buddhism.

Okinawa is a small island of the coast of Japan and China. At the time it was located in the middle of a major trading route for many countries, notably Japan and China. Therefore Okinawa was exposed to different cultural exchanges from many countries. It is not known when trading martial arts techniques and ideas began, but in 1372 Okinawa’s King Satto decided to exchange diplomatic delegations with the Ming Emperor of China. A piece of this exchange included people who were well informed about martial arts in their own countries. The Okinawans borrowed from the Chinese martial arts, namely, Kung fu and other improved their own fighting method by using pieces of the Chinese styles and modifying them to their own benefits.

Between 1477 and 1526, Satsuma Domain from Japan invaded Okinawa and banned the use of weapons. People of Okinawa started adopting Chinese style martial arts (Kung Fu) where the bare hand forms of combat. This fighting style became known as “tode” or “the Chinese hand”. The Chinese name for tode can also be pronounced as “kara”, this was joined with the original “te”, so the word “Karate” was used.

Weapons were made by normal household items. There were no need for buying weapons, the farmers used what they had and what was used on the farm. For example the bo staff may have been used to plow fields. The nunchaku may have been used to steer the horse by putting the chain in the mouth of the horse and hold the other to ends to steer the
horse. The farmers and others practiced with these weapons so that they could defend themselves from the Japanese samurais that would attack their farms.

Karate continued to improve and change through years in three main Okinawan towns namely Shuri, Naha and Tomari. Each town named their type of karate something different, Shuri to Shuri-te, Naha to Naha-te, and Tomari to Tomari-te. Gradually they divided into two main groups: 1) Shorin-ryu which is one of the major styles of martial arts we study at US-AMA. It is made up of Shuri-te, and Tomari-te. 2) Shorei-ryu which is made up of Naha-te.

Map of China, Okinawa and Japan, A major trade route between China & Japan
Okinawa Island (Cities Tomari, Naha & Shuri)
7. Legacy

No one is sure of how Bodhidharma passed away. But in his burial tomb there is only one of his sandals. Some people believe he came back to life and is living in the Himalayas as a spirit carrying one of his sandals. Bodhidharma influenced Kung Fu to their shaolin monks in the creation of Kung Fu. The monks continued to develop and soon it became full martial arts. Kung Fu spread around China. The Kung Fu moved to Okinawa and after many generations it arrived in Hawaii following World War II. From there it continued to the U.S mainland and continued to develop to the form in which I currently study.
8. Details about Bharatanatyam and Kalaripayattu

This is a shaolin Kung Fu cat stance. This is a Bharatanatyam dance stance.
Kung-Fu animal stances:

Kalaripayattu animal stances:

Black Belt report by Aravinth Ruppa
9. Bodhidharma’s Influence

Bodhidharma

Eighteen Hands

Shaolin Kung Fu

United States of America

Karate/Weapons

Okinawa

UNITED STATES
ACADEMY OF MARTIAL ARTS

Black Belt report by Aravinth Ruppa
Bodhidharma remains today a prime symbol of the will-power, determination and self-discipline that are essential to succeed in the martial arts. Following his example, the modern martial artist tries to endure what is most difficult to do, and practice what is most difficult to practice (Like hours of kata). Bodhidharma's example of the Master-student relationship for teaching the way to enlightenment still lives throughout the martial arts. His teachings in Shaolin Kung Fu passed on to Japan and many other countries. After many years, cultural influences and adaptations one branch leads to modern day karate. Bodhidharma is known and accepted as the father of karate and most of the Asian Martial Arts.
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Stories from Chinese Literature - By Tsutomu Kambe
The Karate Handbook - By Ray Pawlett
Karate's History and Traditions - By Bruce A. Haines
6 Points that have helped me progress

1. Be regular to class
2. Practice at home and at the dojo
3. Find a motivational factor about whatever you do that will push you
4. Take the positive feedback from others that will help you grow
5. Every time you do something do it better the next time
6. Use the opportunity that presents itself